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Issue 179

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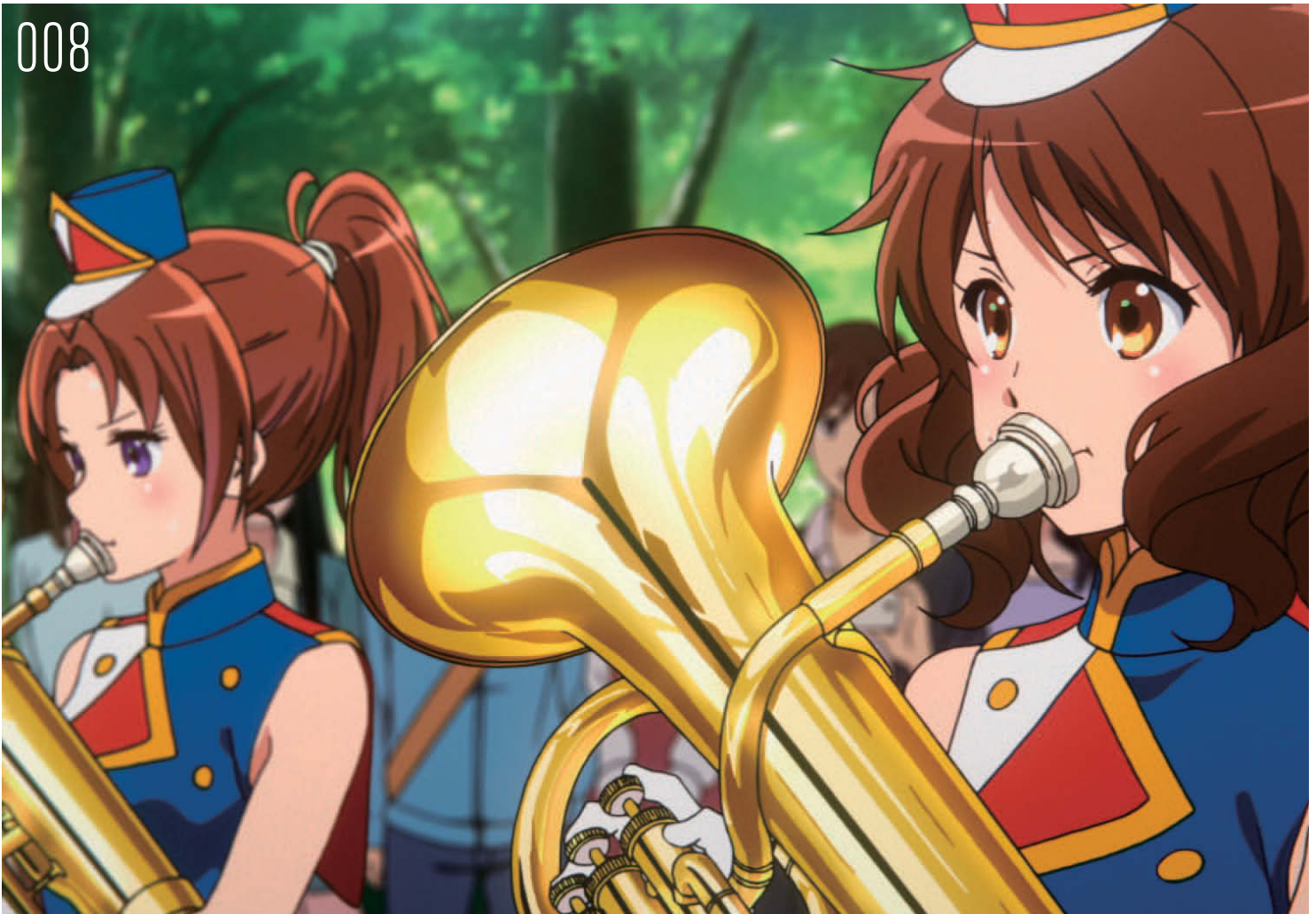
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DISCOVER THE DARK SIDE  
OF TIME TRAVEL AS WE DELVE  
INTO SPOILER TERRITORY





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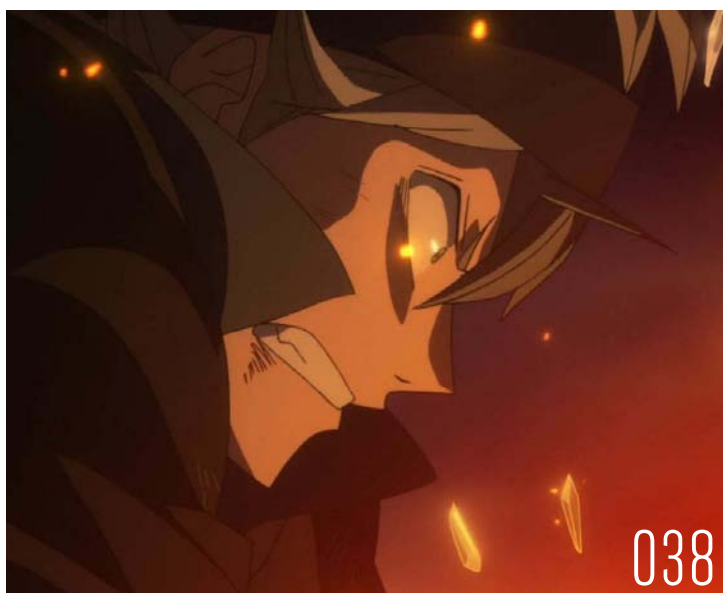
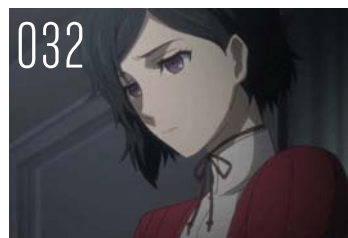


Photo by Naoki Inoko

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# WELCOME

WELCOME TO issue 179 of NEO! This month we have a brand new correspondent in Japan, itching to tell you all about life in the Land of the Rising Sun. Mark Guthrie's inaugural column, over on page 034, is all about how to stay cool in the humid heat of summer. Unfortunately, it seems unlikely any of the tips will translate to Blighty, as it involves the exquisite art of kawadoko: riverside dining. While a picnic by the river sounds all very nice, Kyotoites take it a step further with elaborate multi-course meals, eaten on platforms constructed directly over icy cold, fresh running water. While us Brits are dodging the flies and ants to munch on a cheese sandwich, patrons of the kawadoko experience eat delicious sashimi and local delicacies while dangling their feet directly in the mountain-cold stream. Sitting here in the middle of a frankly outrageous heatwave, I have to admit I might just be a touch jealous...

If you'd like another trip to Japan, albeit vicariously, we have another couple of treats for you. First up, Emily Valentine's piece on page 028, which celebrates the many ways in which London is turning Japanese, and secondly, our visit to the fictional cities of Kamurocho and Sotenbori, thanks to our coverage of *Yakuza Kiwami 2* which starts on page 098. We interviewed series producer Daisuke Sato and US localisation producer Scott Strichart about bringing a true flavour of Japan to the yakuza experience, and I can't wait to walk the virtual streets myself! (Of course, there will probably be fewer mini games in real life...) Until next time!

GEMMA COX, EDITOR



## MEET THE TEAM

### TOM SMITH



"My passport has never been so busy! I was with pop mannequins FEMM in Berlin, then a heavy metal festival tour of Germany and

UK with LOVEBITES. Next, plenty of sleeps and a proper shower! And more *Pokémon Go*, add me; 8152 2163 3079"

### DAVID WEST



"It was a treat to revisit the films of screenwriter Shinobu Hashimoto this month. His book, *Compound Cinematics*, details

his partnership with Akira Kurosawa and is a fascinating insight into Kurosawa's working methods."

### JONATHAN CLEMENTS



"I spoke at the Liverpool World Museum about Qin dynasty burial customs and the Terracotta Warriors. Amazed

at how excited people are about the exhibition there – a pig-pile of selfies and exuberance."

### LEEANN HAMILTON



"I've bought a graphics monitor / tablet doohickey. Three solid weeks of fairs and cons enabled me to make that upgrade, as

well as my diminished eyesight. Hey, I'm old and bold enough, and I'll be using it to deliver more art!"

### JACOB BONIFACE



"I've finally gotten around to checking out *Megalobox*. It's about post-apocalyptic boxers who whack each other with big robot

arms (and a cool retro art style), so it pretty much has everything I could want from a series!"

### ANDREW OSMOND



"I write a lot about time travel this issue. For further reading, I heartily recommend the original novel *All You Need is Kill* by Hiroshi Sakurazaka,

which was fascinatingly and successfully reworked by Hollywood as *Edge of Tomorrow*."

### ALEX JONES



"Excited to see *Attack on Titan* back for its third season so soon after all the big developments in the anime last year.

Not having a four year wait between seasons this time around is much appreciated!"

### EMILY VALENTINE



"World Cup fever is over, but the 2019 Rugby World Cup and Tokyo 2020 are just around the corner! Our passion for Japanese culture

is at an all time high here in the UK, so I've been taking a closer look at places you can get your Japan fix in London."





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# THE SOUND OF SILENCE!

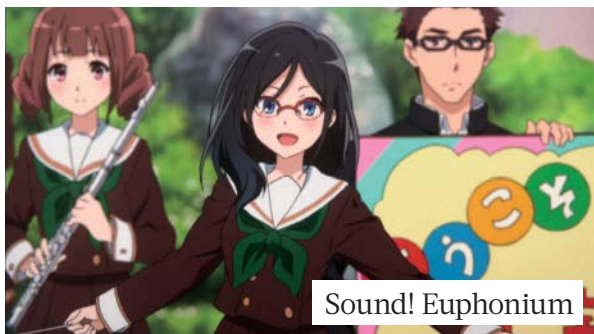
*Sound! Euphonium* is the latest musical masterpiece to make its way over to UK shores! But this orchestral extravaganza isn't all just fun and games. NEO's Jacob Boniface checks out the show – as well as a few others that focus on the trials of extracurricular pursuits!

THE LATEST IN a long line of critically acclaimed series from Kyoto Animation, *Sound! Euphonium* follows the exploits of Kumiko Oumae, a new student to both Kitauji High School and its very own orchestra. Unfortunately, the club has seen better days, with recent months seeing several students leaving to pursue other activities. But with the addition of Kumiko's fledgling skills on the euphonium (which is a kind of large brass horn), and those of her newfound friends in the orchestra, things are sure to turn around for the band!

The series started life as a collection of light novels, penned by Ayano Takeda, with illustrations by Nikki Asada. While the anime series has only has two seasons so far, there are currently nine whole volumes of the novels released to date, with more on the way, as Takeda and Asada show no signs of slowing down any time soon! This is good news for all you soon-to-be fans of the anime's new release, not to mention the upcoming promise of the series' three existing movies that adapt sections of the mainline plot as well as spin-off side stories.

As if that wasn't enough, a fourth movie, entitled *Sound! Euphonium the Movie: Oath's Finale*, is set to debut in Japan sometime next year – which, despite the climactic-sounding title, will actually introduce a whole new generation of band members.

But before all that, there's still the series' opening chapters to experience, in the form of *Sound! Euphonium's* first season boxset, being released on 24 September by Anime Limited. As mentioned, the first season follows Kumiko Oumae's introduction to the high school band, and the new joy she finds in performing music as a part of it – but she isn't the only member of said band, and for some, things might not quite be as joyful as they first seem...



Sound! Euphonium

## BEHIND THE MUSIC

The orchestra's new advisor, for example, music teacher Noboru Taki, originally seems to be a detriment to the band's formerly carefree spirit. While in previous years, the band members were used to a more easy-going approach to their musical endeavours, Taki's takeover ushers in a culture of strict determination and hard work when it comes to both practise and the band's future goals. However, despite the band's initial misgivings, they later come to respect their new mentor's work ethic, as he pushes them to musical heights they thought themselves incapable of, especially when it is eventually revealed that Taki is just as hard on himself as he is on anyone else. There's a tragic event in his past which encourages him to achieve all that he can – and push others to do the same, no matter the cost!

And it's not just adults who have problems that linger behind the music; certain members of the Kitauji High School Band do as well. One of the series' main characters is Asuka Tanaka, an outgoing third-year who seems to have it all, while her greater experience with the euphonium makes her something of a mentor to protagonist Kumiko. But Asuka's bubbly and confident personality are revealed to be hiding other problems in her life which eventually come to affect her love of life both inside and outside the concert hall. To find out just what the mystery is behind Asuka's troubled double life, you'll have to check out the series, but it turns out that Asuka is far from the only anime character whose after-school activities become an outlet for their inner pain!

## AND ALL THAT JAZZ

Another example which also revolves around music is 2012's *Kids on the Slope*. Adapted from Yuki Kodama's manga by famed >>>



Kids on the Slope





1. Kumiko and her new bandmates marvel in awe at... something! 2. Seirin's ace, Kagami Taiga, faces down a formidable foe. 3. Known as the 'Phantom Sixth Man', Kuroko is arguably the backbone of the Seirin team. 4. The King of the Court, sentencing a commoner to death (or possibly just volleyball defeat). 5. Hinata's never-give-up attitude is part of what makes him such a likeable hero.

## EUPHONIUMS AND MORE!

Despite what the title might have you believe, it's not just euphonium players who are the stars of this show! Joining Kumiko on her musical journey are musicians who specialise in a variety of instruments – some of the newest members of the band playing the trumpet, drums, tuba, or even the upright bass.

>>> anime director Shinichiro Watanabe, *Kids on the Slope* is set in rural Japan circa 1966, and follows the musical coming-of-age journey of the titular kids, Kaoru, Sentaro, and Ritsuko.

When Kaoru's father changes job postings for the umpteenth time, he finds himself living in an idyllic countryside town on the island of Kyushu. A shy and reserved introvert with an overbearing family who expect nothing but the best of him, Kaoru finds that music, specifically the piano, is the only way he has to express his true feelings. But rather than the classical pieces that his family expects him to master, Kaoru's true love is jazz, which is what leads to his chance meeting with Sentaro. Sentaro is seemingly the textbook delinquent, brash and loud with a huge physique – but he too leads a somewhat troubled life.

While Sentaro's mother was Japanese, his father was an American soldier – something that was quite controversial in post-World War II Japan – and as such, the hulking drummer is looked down upon by most members of his family. However, his friendship with several other members of the small community, which comes to include the initially aloof Kaoru, is something

that brings joy into his life – but nothing does this quite so much as his prodigious talent for playing the drums!

Together, the pair team up to form a musical duo, and along with Sentaro's friend Ritsuko and other members of the local jazz scene, find solace in their love of music as it brings meaning to their lives, as well as enabling their deepening friendship. The series follows them throughout the trials and tribulations of both their pasts and futures, in classic coming-of-age style, with an excellent soundtrack to boot!

## TROUBLED ACES

Sometimes the protagonists of these extracurricular anime aren't simply nursing some tragic past injury that's waiting to be healed; some troubled aces begin with negative personality traits that they develop beyond, via their chosen after-school vocation. And these kind of characters are ubiquitous in the humble sports anime!

One such flawed ace is *Haikyu!*'s very own 'King of the Court', Tobio Kageyama. If you're not familiar with Haruichi







Haikyuu!



Kuroko's Basketball



Kuroko's Basketball



Kuroko's Basketball

"SOMETIMES THE PROTAGONISTS OF THESE ANIME AREN'T SIMPLY NURSING SOME TRAGIC PAST INJURY THAT'S WAITING TO BE HEALED; SOME TROUBLED ACES BEGIN WITH NEGATIVE PERSONALITY TRAITS THAT THEY DEVELOP BEYOND VIA THEIR CHOSEN AFTER-SCHOOL VOCATION. AND THESE KIND OF CHARACTERS ARE UBIQUITOUS IN THE HUMBLE SPORTS ANIME!"

Furudate's *Shonen Jump* sports manga turned smash hit anime, it primarily follows the diminutive new volleyball player Shoyo Hinata, a first-year high schooler who might be far from the tallest guy on the court, but who has some special skills of his very own, mainly the ability to jump higher than anyone else – which goes a long way to making up for his other shortcomings! Inspired by the 'Little Giant' – a former high school volleyball ace who also cut a rather small silhouette – Hinata attends the Little Giant's alma mater, Karasuno High, in the hopes of emulating his idol, but that's far from the only thing spurring him on!

An unfortunate match-up with a powerhouse school led to Hinata's last (and only) volleyball game ending in a crushing defeat, led by the aforementioned 'King of the Court', Tobio Kageyama. Kageyama's smug attitude and condescending put-downs towards the plucky Hinata motivate him even further to one day defeat his newfound rival, but his plans change when he arrives for his first day at Karasuno only to find Kageyama is now attending the same school!

As the *other* protagonist of *Haikyuu!*, Kageyama is everything that Hinata isn't when it comes to athleticism, but what he has in ace-level volleyball skills, he makes up for with his bad people skills and arrogant personality! It takes some time,

but Kageyama does (eventually) begin to enjoy the game for what it is, rather than just a way of feeling superiority over his opponents. He develops his character to the point that he begins to make friends among the team (even with his erstwhile rival Hinata), rather than simply seeing his Karasuno comrades as pawns to be ordered around with a haughty demeanour. Though the number one star of *Haikyuu!* might be Hinata, it's arguably Kageyama who goes through the largest amount of growth, both athletically and personally, as the series proceeds – all through his love of the sport!

### TEAMWORK WINS

Such flawed aces also abound in another *Shonen Jump* sports alumnus, the flashy and energetic *Kuroko's Basketball*. The series also focuses on another unlikely pairing – the seemingly talentless and unassuming Kuroko, and his gargantuan partner Kagami, an improbably-sized high-schooler in a world of improbably-sized high-schoolers. While Kuroko does turn out to have a few tricks up his sleeve – such as his uncanny ability to misdirect opponent's attention to the point that he becomes functionally invisible – it's clear from the outset that Kagami is the new ace on the team. >>>

### SEASON ONE

While there's certainly plenty of content from the *Sound! Euphonium* novels and manga for the anime to adapt going forward, this collection of Season One covers a hefty portion of Kumiko's story, following the her and the band from her first day of high school to their performance at the Sunrise Festival.





Sound! Euphonium

"THERE'S HUNDREDS MORE ANIME CHARACTERS WHO THROW THEMSELVES INTO THEIR CHOSEN CALLING TO DISTRACT THEMSELVES FROM SOME HIDDEN PAIN OR TRAUMA IN THEIR LIFE, OFTEN IN FAR MORE FAR-FLUNG OR FANTASTICAL SETTINGS!"

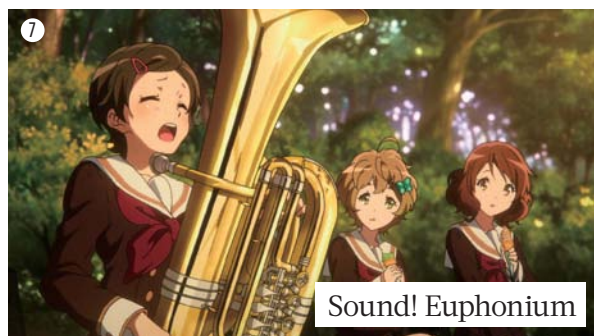
## SPINOFF

The *Sound! Euphonium* spinoff movie, *Liz and the Blue Bird*, was only loosely marketed as connected to the show, despite sharing a setting and focusing on minor characters from the mainline series. However, the movie proved to be incredibly popular in its own right, even with people who'd never seen the original show, making it a true breakout hit!

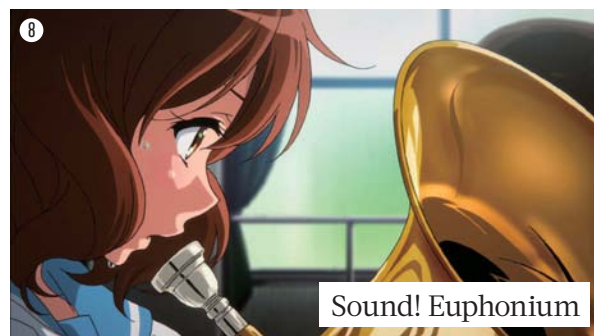
>>> As the series begins, Kagami eschews any and all attempts for teamwork when he's on the court, believing that he, and he alone, can secure victory for his team. But as part of the Seirin High basketball team, a relatively new squad with big dreams, Kagami soon comes to find that the competition is fiercer than he might have first thought! But while Kagami initially just recognises his teammates for their talents on the basketball court, he soon comes to see the intrinsic value of the teamwork – and through that, friendship – that Kuroko proclaims (quietly) to be the most important part of the sport. Fans of the series have often inferred Kagami's loneliness from his solitary lifestyle and initially gruff demeanour, but that all changes as the series

continues. Although he always appears outwardly grumpy, later episodes of the anime and manga chapters see Kagami become close friends with every member of the Seirin team, even going so far as to teach his other major talent – cooking – to Riko, the team's coach (and disastrous amateur chef).

But while Kagami is an almost instant success story on the healing powers of teamwork, the Seirin team's rivals, and Kuroko's former teammates, are the exact opposite. Named the 'Generation of Miracles', these genius-level ballers each dominate the court in their own way, and none of them respect the skills of anyone even close to as much as they do their own. While certain members of the 'Generation' are eventually swayed by Kuroko's



Sound! Euphonium



Sound! Euphonium





Sound! Euphonium

outlook on life (usually after a clutch victory by the Seirin underdogs), it's sadly rare to see most of these characters getting on with their team the way that Kagami does!

## FANTASTIC BUT FLAWED

However, while these are all realistic depictions of common after-school activities, there's still hundreds upon hundreds more anime characters who throw themselves into their chosen calling to distract themselves from some hidden pain or trauma in their life, often in far more far-flung or fantastical settings!

Perhaps the most famous might be *Cowboy Bebop*'s Spike Spiegel. Another opus by the aforementioned director Watanabe, Spike needs little introduction, as the space-faring bounty hunter who has inspired characters in a variety of mediums since the show's debut in the late '90s. For Spike, bounty hunting is far from just a way to pay the bills (especially since his infamous bad luck keeps getting in his way!). He also throws himself wholeheartedly into dangerous situations with wild abandon for a variety of reasons, but the underlying one is Spike's blasé attitude towards his own life after being seemingly betrayed by

the woman he loved.

And then of course there's Edward Elric, the famed *Fullmetal Alchemist* (from the series of the same name!). Although he's a talented young alchemist from the beginning of the series, he truly finds his calling when his life begins to take several dramatic turns for the worst. After losing his mother, then two limbs, and accidentally obliterating his brother's physical form in a botched transmutation, Edward pursues what was formerly a passion with renewed vigour, giving up almost everything to become a good enough alchemist to bring back his brother Alphonse's body. While that objective is certainly paramount in his endeavours, Ed's high-obsessive alchemical pursuits are almost certainly a way to distract himself from the pain in his past.

Of course, it's not all doom and gloom! Most of these flawed and troubled heroes and heroines do find themselves coming to a better place through the efforts that they put into their passion projects, and whether it's a relatable slice-of-life problem or an epic fantastical struggle, it's always inspiring to see a character we have come to love succeed against their inner demons! ●

6. Third-year Kaori acts as one of the new members' many mentors, as well as leading the trumpet section.

7. Even just carrying a tuba around is hard work, not to mention playing it! 8. Kumiko nervously takes her first steps towards musical mastery! 9. The Kitauji High School Band (or at least the wind section) plays their hearts out! 10. Bounty hunting in space is a stressful job, as you can see from Spike's expression here. 11. Despite the many, many obstacles in their way, the Elric brothers take on all comers together!



Cowboy Bebop



Fullmetal Alchemist





# POKÉMON INVASION

Prepare for an influx of cute

SINCE 1995, PIKACHU and his ever-increasing horde of tiny critter friends have been relentlessly pulling on our heart strings – and our purse strings. Whilst *Pokémon*'s glorious youth saw it filling cinema screens and creating an insatiable demand for collecting cards, who could have predicted that in 2018, the franchise would still be setting records – and beating stiff competition from huge names like *Star Wars*, the Marvel Cinematic Universe and even *Harry Potter* to become the top grossing franchise of all time? *Pokémon* has earned an estimated \$59.1 billion since its inception, with *Star Wars* coming in a respectable second place with \$42.9 billion. And the onslaught looks set to continue, as the franchise still has some big things coming our way.

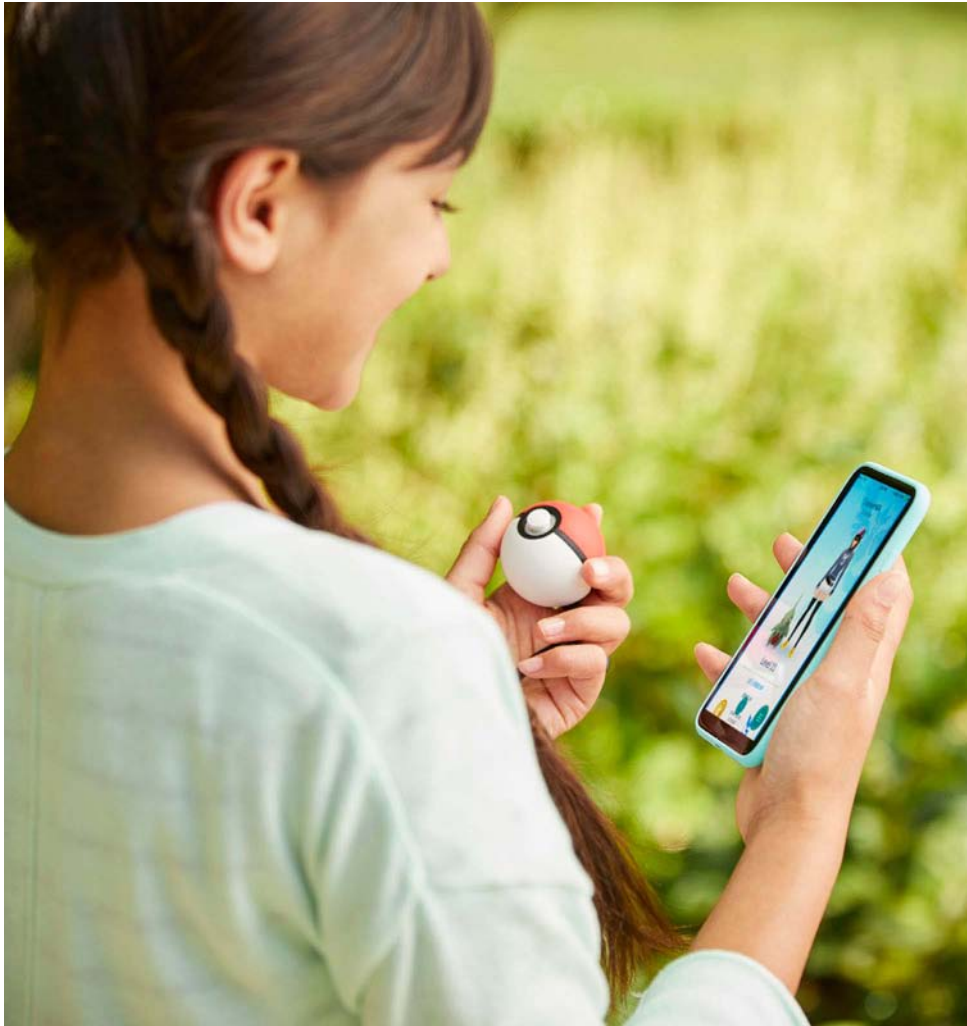
Last month, The Pokémon Company and Character Options Ltd unveiled a brand new toy collection for 2018 which includes a range of action figures, plushies, and role-play items for kids, cosplayers, and people of any age who can appreciate the value of cuteness. The action figures come in four scales, from 2 inch static figures to 3 inch articulated ones, plus 4.5 inch battle figures with 'deluxe actions' that see them launching or swimming. The impressively detailed Legendary Figures stand at 12 inches high and have multiple points of articulation and come with display stands. Meanwhile, the plushies also come in a range of sizes and price points, with Clip-ons and soft Poké Balls being the smallest, working all the way up to the impressive talking Power Action Pikachu, which has light and sound effects. Finally, the role-play items include Pop Action Poké Balls which launch Pokémon from inside, or the Clip and Go Poké Ball Belt set. The range is set to hit

shops in autumn, and these three categories will be replenished with more products throughout the year, meaning there will always be something new on the shelves!

One of the driving forces behind the current pokéboom has been the popularity of mobile game *Pokémon Go*, which still boasted as many as 20 million+ daily users in December 2017, with developer Niantic continuing to add new features for the pokéobsessed. The fun doesn't stop for gamers, as Nintendo are also releasing *Pokémon: Let's Go, Pikachu!* and *Pokémon: Let's Go, Eevee!* on the Switch this November. Based on *Pokémon Yellow*, the game sees players return to the Kanto region to take on those original 151 Pokémon, using an updated catch system that seems to be influenced by *Pokémon Go*'s pared down mechanics, ditching the turn-based battle style of previous games. Nintendo are also releasing a new peripheral at the same time which looks just like a Pokéball from the game: the Poké Ball Plus. Not only can you use it to catch Pokémon in the game, but it also features a handy joystick and button so it can be used to navigate outside of battles. Fans of the main series games will have to wait until the latter part of 2019 for a new core instalment to the franchise, when the new, eighth generation of Pokémon are revealed.

Finally, one project that could bring even more fans into the fold is Hollywood movie *Detective Pikachu*, which began shooting this year and has an all-star cast including *Deadpool*'s Ryan Reynolds as the voice of Pikachu, Ken Watanabe as Detective Yoshida, plus Bill Nighy and Rita Ora in unspecified roles. The movie currently has a scheduled release date of 10 May 2019. ●





Uh oh! Someone's got a Clip and Go Poké Ball Belt! Run!



Don't be fooled by that cute face. Eevee is an adorable fighting machine!



# //COMING UP CODE VEIN

OUT:2019 // DISTRIBUTOR: BANDAI NAMCO ENTERTAINMENT

Originally planned for release on 28 September, Bandai Namco's *Code Vein* has been bumped back to 2019 to allow more time for the developers to refine the game. Cut from a similar cloth to *Dark Souls*, *Code Vein* is set in a post-apocalyptic world where the Revenants, the last dwindling stock of humans, battle for survival against the terrifying Lost. The gameplay mixes hand-to-hand melee and long-range weapons with a gothic cyberpunk aesthetic and a seriously challenging level of difficulty.





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# NEO'S TOPTEN

Our roundup of the hottest tracks currently  
blasting on the office stereo

WORDS BY TOM SMITH

## 1 SUMIRE UESAKA – POP TEAM EPIC CD FROM 7 SEP!

Anime voice veteran and J-pop supremo Sumire Uesaka is about to drop her third album; *No More Vacances*. It's set to include the mega-

hit *POP TEAM EPIC*, used as the opening to the finger flippin' series of the same name, and will be heading to the UK on CD and digital formats via JPU Records! We suspect her use of the French word for "holidays" in the title is a cheeky acknowledgement of the downside of being the current in-thing in Japan, especially with the *POP TEAM EPIC* single topping charts everywhere, including Spotify's trending playlist alongside western pop and hip-hop giants. Perhaps that's why the album's artwork has Sumire in Asia – her last "vacance" before hitting the promo circuit!

Sumire's no stranger to using other languages than Japanese. She's a massive Russia enthusiast which saw her being cast as *Girls Und Panzer's* resident Russian Nonna, and also had Sumire sing two songs entirely in Russian from the soundtrack – that's devotion! The JPU version of the album will feature transliterated lyrics, so you can sing along too. An absolute must for fans of Kyary Pamyu Pamyu and quirky J-pop.



## 2 COLDRAIN – FEED THE FIRE 18-30 SEPTEMBER!

Japan's rock heroes Coldrain will be in the UK this September supporting Crown The Empire. The boys are back for dates in Brighton, Southampton, Bristol, London, Birmingham, Dublin, Belfast, Glasgow, Newcastle, Manchester and Norwich – if your stomping grounds are any of those places we highly recommend you attend!

Coldrain's *FEED THE FIRE* is taken from their latest album *FATELESS* and was also featured as the kickass opening theme to *King's Game The Animation*. Previous album *VENA II* dropped in 2016 after the band had established themselves outside of Japan with a number of tours and festival appearances, including Download Festival. On that release they recorded *Runaway* and managed to land their first overseas guest vocalist for its release; Jacoby "Cut My Life Into Pieces" Shaddix of Papa Roach! The band's back catalogue is available to download and stream right now from Spotify and iTunes, amongst other services. A number of their recent albums are also available on CD in the UK via Hopeless Records.



## 3 ERO KERO BONITO – TIME TODAY 2-6 OCTOBER!

What better way to bring back those summer vibes than bouncing along to Kero Kero Bonito in a venue near you! They'll be on tour this October with shows in London, Brighton, Bristol, Manchester, Glasgow and Dublin. Influenced by J-pop, dancehall and video game music, the trio sing about everything from Flamingos and Laser Quest, to doing absolutely nothing at all (the theme of their song and video *Break*, check it out on YouTube!).

Formed in London, the group signed with Sony Music Japan and became a hit in Japan with the release of their latest album *Bonito Generation*. Part of the success was down to singer Sarah Midori Perry who would rap in Japanese and English on the record.

The group self-released new EP *TOTEP* in February this year and it sees them explore a slightly different sound by playing instruments instead of manipulating samplers and Casio keyboards like before.



UK TOUR! NEW ALBUM!



## 4 CROSSFAITH – CATASTROPHE 13-21 OCTOBER

We're writing this the same day that Japan's metalcore giants Crossfaith unleashed their latest beast of a single, *Catastrophe*. The explosive track is taken from their upcoming album *EX\_MACHINA*, due for release overseas on 3 August via UNFD.

In preparation for the new album, Crossfaith have been touring relentlessly. June had them playing the metal festival circuit across Europe (with poor bass player Hiro being hospitalised for rocking a bit too hard while suffering with appendicitis). In the UK they'll be playing shows in Bristol, Glasgow, Nottingham, London, Sheffield and Dublin. It's gonna get sweaty!

## 5 B.T.S. – DNA 9, 10 OCTOBER

Korean mega stars B.T.S. have only gone and sold out the London O2 Arena. TWICE! Both days of the boys' London debut at the mighty venue have sold out months ahead of the shows, taking place on 9 and 10 October. Tickets prices on eBay are deep into triple digits and we only expect them to raise as the concert approaches.

B.T.S.'s 2017 tour saw them smash 40 sold-out concerts across 19 cities. This current tour sees them playing in 11 cities across Europe, North America and Asia and follows the release of third studio album *LOVE YOURSELF*.

## 6 DIR EN GREY – NINGEN WO KABURU ALBUM: 26 SEPTEMBER GIG: 16 OCTOBER

Scary noise makers Dir en grey have announced the title of their latest album via a creepy video on their YouTube channel. Little information has been revealed besides its title *The Insulated World*, and that it will be available in Japan in various editions with bonuses from 26 September. We expect an announcement from European label Okami Records soon.

The news follows the band's European tour announcement, which will see them play a show at The Electric Ballroom in Camden, London on 16 October. Regular tickets are priced at £33 (including the booking fee) and available from the venue's website.



NEW ALBUM! UK DATE!

## 7 ROA – USHISM OUT NOW!

"This is our best music video ever!" guitarist and band-manager Shuu tells us. His band ROA, a modern rock act that implement two traditional shamisen players, recently played a series of shows in London last month and released this music video to celebrate. "I'm so happy to be back in England! I did homestay here when I was ten years old. I stayed with a nice family in Leicester. Being back and showing my host family how far I've come since then was fantastic!". The band's UK only album *RODIAC* is out now.



UK TOUR!

## 8 TRICOT – POTAGE 11-18 NOVEMBER

Lowercase math rockers tricot recently released their fifth single *potage* and have just announced a UK tour to boot! They'll be playing their bubbly guitar hits in Brighton, Bristol, Nottingham, Glasgow and Manchester before concluding at ENJOY Sugoi Festival in London on 18 November. The festival is split over two days with fellow Japanese math rockers LITE headlining the first day on 17 November and tricot the next day. A number of bands are on the line-up, including British-based Japanese artist Yoshino Shighara with her eclectic band.

## 9 MIKU HATSUNE – WORLD IS MINE 8 DECEMBER!

Virtual idol phenomenon Miku Hatsune will be projecting her way across Europe for the first time later this year as part of the MIKU EXPO, including a show at Olympia in London on 8 December! The remaining tickets are on sale now priced at £50 plus fees via seetickets.com. VIP tickets sold out the moment they went on sale.



UK DATE!

## 10 ENA FUJITA – IENAI KOTO WA UTA NO NAKA OUT NOW!



NEW SINGLE

The singer-songwriter gravure idol is back with her latest single via JPU. Be warned, the video sees her gunning down bikini-clad immigration officers – blood goes e'rywhere! It's from her latest film *WELCOME TO JAPAN* by *Meatball Machine Kodaku* director Yoshiro Nishimura. She plays an ultranationalist assassin who gradually sees the errors of her ways with each foreign skull she smashes. Or something. It looks bloody bonkers.



# THE DISC-COVERED COUNTRY

JONATHAN CLEMENTS ON THE SLOW DEATH OF DVD

It was Sentai's Filmworks' Matt Greenfield, then at ADV Films, who uttered the magic words to me at a party in 2001: "The next format is no format." And for many of you, watching anime on a laptop screen in your bedroom, streaming it straight from the interwebs, that prophecy has come to pass. What surprises me 17 years later is that it's still not true for so many of us – the anime market remains a healthy niche in the entertainment business, possibly because anime fans were some of the first to notice that online streaming sites were anything but permanent archives.

But anime fans without a Blu-ray player may soon have little choice except to knuckle up and buy one. Companies all over the globe are giving up on DVD, and with the likes of Sentai Filmworks in the USA, and Madman in Australia not even bothering to burn DVD masters any more, this inevitably affects those companies that rely on them for materials. Now, in Britain, MVM's Tony Allen announces that his company is releasing *Flip Flappers* only on Blu-ray, because DVD masters were not forthcoming from his overseas partners.

"EVEN THOUGH ONLY 15% OF THE UK PUBLIC SEEMINGLY OWNS A BLU-RAY PLAYER, ROUGHLY 60% OF ANIME SALES ARE ON BLU-RAY. IT MAY WELL BE THAT THE TRUE FIGURE IS SIGNIFICANTLY HIGHER, AND THAT MANY OF THE DVDS "SOLD" IN DUAL-FORMAT PACKS ARE LITTLE MORE THAN THROWAWAY COASTERS TO PURCHASERS WHO DON'T NEED THEM – WE CAN'T SAY FOR SURE."

This column reported way back in NEO 95 on the decision by Bandai America to give up on DVD. If it's taken another six years for everybody else to catch up, it's because Bandai trusted other companies to take up the slack by licensing the products for DVD themselves. This latest round of cancellations reflects the fact they have stopped bothering.

Even though only 15% of the UK public seemingly owns a Blu-ray player, roughly 60% of anime sales are on Blu-ray. It may well be that the true figure is significantly higher, and that many of the DVDs "sold" in dual-format packs are little more than throwaway coasters to purchasers who don't need them – we can't say for sure.

But American Blu-ray sales peaked in 2013 and have been plummeting ever since. Last year, *Den of Geek* observed



1. "If you try to take my Blu-ray collection from me, so help me, I will nibble your arm until you stop." 2. *Flip Flappers* will only be available in the UK on Blu-ray: a sign of the times?



that Cameron Crow's *Aloha* (2014) didn't even go "straight to DVD" in the UK, but went straight-to-streaming. Could it be curtains for all discs...?

"Packaged goods", as they're known, still form a crucial part of the anime market, because without a physical disc containing the film, it's impossible for a distributor to sell you the box that it comes in, with the foil on the box, and the special foldy-out thing, and the liner notes, and all the other things that create value in a collector's edition. So Blu-ray is here to stay, at least in anime, at least for the immediate future. There can be no flip flapping on that. ●





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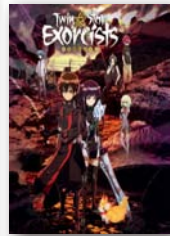
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# UK release schedule



## ANIME

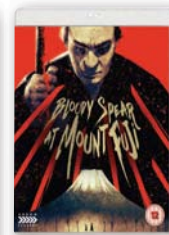
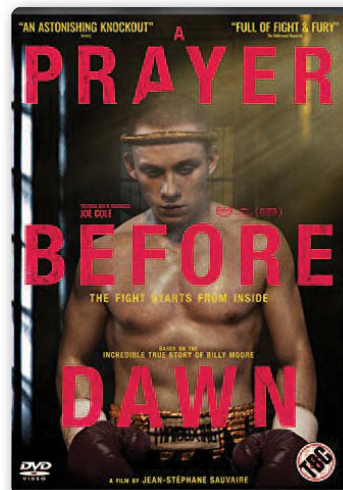
DATE	TITLE	DISTRIBUTOR
20/08	Naruto Shippuden Box 33 [DVD]	Manga
20/08	One Piece [Uncut] Collection 18 [DVD]	Manga
20/08	Sword Art Online II: Part 4 [Blu-ray]	Anime Limited
27/08	Fate Stay Night: UBW Part 1 [Blu-ray]	MVM
27/08	Bakuon! Collection [DVD, Blu-ray]	MVM
27/08	Asterisk War Part 1 [DVD, Blu-ray]	MVM
27/08	Aoharu x Machinegun [DVD, Blu-ray]	Anime Limited
27/08	Eureka Seven: Hi-Evolution Movie 1 [Collector's combi, DVD, Blu-ray]	Anime Limited
27/08	Twin Star Exorcist: Part 1 [Blu-ray, DVD]	Anime Limited
03/09	Digimon Tamers [DVD]	Manga
03/09	Sword Oratoria [Combi Collector's]	MVM
03/09	Flip Flappers Collection [Blu-ray]	MVM
10/09	Fate Stay Night: UBW Part 2 [Blu-ray]	MVM
10/09	And You Thought There's Never A Girl Online [DVD, Blu-ray]	MVM
10/09	Junjo Romantica Season 1 [Blu-ray]	Anime Limited
17/09	Grimoire of Zero [Combi Collector's]	MVM
17/09	Battle Girl High School Collection [Blu-ray]	MVM
24/09	Cowboy Bebop: The Movie [DVD, Blu-ray]	Manga
24/09	Steamboy [DVD, Blu-ray]	Manga
24/09	Paprika [DVD, Blu-ray]	Manga
24/09	Love Hina Collection [DVD]	MVM
24/09	When They Cry Series 1 Collection [DVD]	MVM
24/09	Angelic Layer Collector's Edition [Blu-ray]	Anime Limited



## MANGA

DATE	TITLE	DISTRIBUTOR
23/08	Anonymous Noise 09	Shojo Beat
23/08	Black Clover 12	Shonen Jump

DATE	TITLE	DISTRIBUTOR
23/08	Black Torch 1	Shonen Jump
23/08	Case Closed 67	VM Shonen Jump Advanced
23/08	Children of the Whales 5	VIZ Media
23/08	Dead Dead Demon's Dededede Destruction 2	VIZ Media
23/08	Food Wars 25	VM Shonen Jump Advanced
23/08	Fullmetal Alchemist: Fullmetal Edition 2	VIZ Media
23/08	Haikyuu!! 26	Shonen Jump
23/08	Homestuck 2	VIZ Media
23/08	Jojo's Bizarre Adventure Part 3 Stardust Crusades 8	VM Shonen Jump Advanced
23/08	Kenka Bancho Otome vol 2	Shojo Beat
23/08	Kuroko's Basketball 2-in-1 Edition 13	Shonen Jump
23/08	Magi 31	VIZ Media
23/08	My Hero Academia 14	Shonen Jump
23/08	One Piece 87	Shonen Jump
23/08	Platinum End 6	Shonen Jump
23/08	Pokémon Horizon: Sun & Moon 1	VIZ Media
23/08	Rin-ne 27	VIZ Media
23/08	RWBY Official Manga Anthology Vol 2	VIZ Media
23/08	The Demon Prince of Momochi House 12	Shojo Beat
23/08	The Promised Neverland 5	Shonen Jump
23/08	Tokyo Ghoul: re 6	VIZ Media
23/08	Toriko 43	Shonen Jump
23/08	Yo-kai Watch 9	VIZ Media
30/08	Aho-Girl: A Cleusless Girl 8	Kodansha
30/08	Otorimonogatari	Vertical
30/08	Chi's Sweet Adventures 2	Vertical
30/08	Dementia 21	Fantagraphics
06/09	Grand Blue Dreaming 2	Kodansha
06/09	Persona Q: Shadow of the Labyrinth Side: P4 3	Kodansha
06/09	A Strange and Mystifying Story 4	SuBlime
06/09	Legend of the Galactic Heroes 7	Haikasoru
06/09	Mobile Suit Gundam Thunderbolt 8	VIZ Media
06/09	Shortcake Cake 1	Shojo Beat
06/09	Sleepy Princess in the Demon Castle 2	VIZ Media



## ASIAN FILM

DATE	TITLE	DISTRIBUTOR
20/08	Police Story/Police Story 2	Eureka
27/08	Akio Jissoji: The Buddhist Trilogy	Arrow Academy
27/08	Jojo's Bizarre Adventure: Diamond Is Unbreakable	Manga Entertainment
03/09	Bloody Spear At Mount Fuji	Arrow Academy
10/09	Tokyo Fetish	Salvation Films
17/09	City Hunter	Eureka
17/09	Horrors Of Malformed Men	Arrow Video
24/09	A Prayer Before Dawn	Altitude Film Entertainment
24/09	Ciao Ciao	Matchbox Films
01/10	Blind Fury	Mediumrare
26/12	Alita: Battle Angel	20th Century Fox
24/02	Sword Of The Assassin	Koch Media
TBC	Operation Red Sea	Cine Asia



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WORDS BY DAVID WEST



# MIRAI

## Hosoda Keeps It In The Family

MAMORU HOSODA'S *MIRAI* holds the distinction of being the first anime feature to premiere at the prestigious Cannes Film Festival. As usual for the director of *Wolf Children*, *Summer Wars* and *The Boy And The Beast*, familial relationships form the beating heart of the film. The story concerns four-year-old Kun who is more than a little put-out by the arrival in the family home of his new-born baby sister Mirai. Cue temper tantrums and bratty outbursts as Kun rebels against the very idea of being displaced as the centre of his parents and grandparents' intimate little universe. Being a Hosoda film, there's some magic at work and Kun, like a pint-sized version of Dicken's Scrooge, faces a series of visitors to teach him about the importance of being a caring big brother to Mirai. These include the family dog, transformed into a human prince, and Kun's mother when she was a young woman, free from her own responsibilities. But lastly and most importantly, Kun is visited by a teenage Mirai from the future to show him the young woman she will grow up to be if only he helps her on the way. As was the case on *The Boy And The Beast*, Hosoda wrote the script for *Mirai* by himself: apparently he's no longer collaborating with Satoko Okudera, who co-wrote the screenplays for *The Girl Who Leapt Through Time*, *Summer Wars* and *Wolf Children* with the director. *Mirai* opens in UK cinemas on 2 November from Anime Ltd.



## BANGED UP ABROAD

### Fighting His Demons

Jean-Stéphane Sauvaire's hard hitting, harrowing drama *A Prayer Before Dawn* is based on the experiences of Billy Moore, an Englishman who was a former amateur boxer with a drug habit which led to his arrest in Thailand and incarceration in the notoriously tough, dirty and violent Klong Prem prison, sardonically nicknamed the Bangkok Hilton. There, he takes up Muay Thai, Thailand's famed national sport of kickboxing, in a bid to survive, make something of himself, and potentially fight his way to freedom. Joe Cole, from *Peaky Blinders*, plays Moore, and the film was actually shot on location in Nakhon Pathom Prison with many of the cast composed of ex-inmates. *A Prayer Before Dawn* will be released on DVD and Blu-ray on 24 September from Altitude Film Distribution, while Billy Moore's autobiographical book of the same name is out now from Maverick House.

## BIG SCREEN KICKS

### Ralph Macchio, Bruce Lee And More!

The third instalment of the Fighting Spirit Film Festival will return with another celebration of martial arts and action cinema at the Stratford Picturehouse, London, on 14 and 15 September. The line-up includes *The Karate Kid Part 2*, the premiere of British action movie *I Am Vengeance*, and Bruce Lee's classic *Enter The Dragon*. Visit [www.fightingspiritfilmfestival.com](http://www.fightingspiritfilmfestival.com) for tickets and showtimes!

## JACKIE DOES MANGA

### And Dresses Up As Chun Li!

Wong Jing's adaptation of Tsukasa Hojo's *City Hunter* was one of Hong Kong cinema's first attempts to bring a manga to life on the big screen. Jackie Chan takes the lead role as private detective Ryo Saeba alongside Joey Wang, Yau Chingmy and Richard Norton. The film comes to Blu-ray in a new 2K restoration from Eureka on 17 September.





# HOW TO DEAR STAGE

NEO'S RESIDENT REAL-LIFE IDOL EXPLAINS ALL!

HELLO! MAHIRU KURUMIZAWA here from idol group Moso Calibration! This issue I would like to introduce you to a live bar I work at called Akihabara Dear Stage, found in the back streets of Akihabara. You'll know you've found it when you spot the raffish shutter next to the heavy sound-proof entry door. This shutter is pretty famous amongst otaku all over the world, so make sure you take a pic with it when you visit! I understand it can be a bit daunting to enter for the first time, so let me guide you through the process – once you do it you can enjoy real Akihabara spirit!

Entrance is 1000 yen (around £6.75) and you'll receive one free drink token. There will be three live stage events a day, all taking place on the ground floor. If you'd like to visit floors two and three you'll need to register as a member online. On these floors you can chat to your "oshi" (otaku slang for your favourite member) and eat something. If you come, I recommend becoming a member first so you can talk to us!

This is the place our senior group Dempagumi.inc was born, as well Moso Calibration. Idols here have a strong independent spirit and are self-produced.

For example, my concept for Moso Calibration is my own idea. Another example is the group Senko Planetagate; this group wear boy uniforms and has a member of staff from the idol anime *Aikatsu!*. The concept is completely their own.

Everyone who works at Dear Stage loves to talk about anime, manga or cosplay. Here you can also cheer on members who are working towards their dream of becoming an anime song singer, idol or something else. Come and visit me and ask me about my dream!

You can follow Mahiru Kurumizawa on Twitter (@lunch\_mahiru) or Instagram (@mahiru104). ●

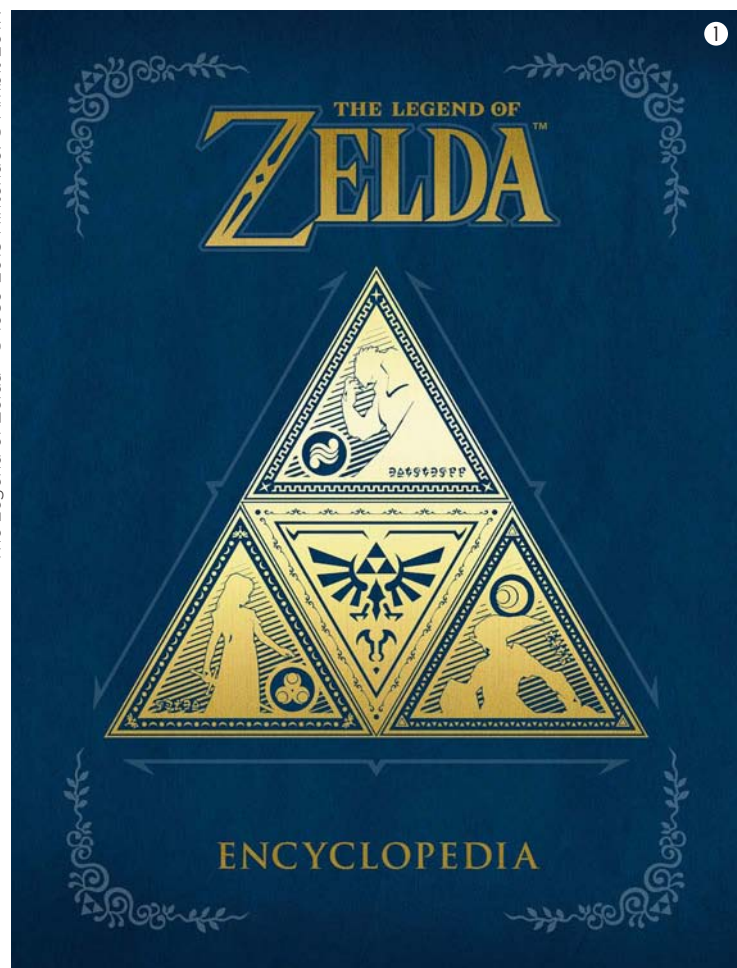




# WE LOVE THIS STUFF!

Check out NEO's pick of the coolest merchandise around this month

The Legend of Zelda™ © 1986-2018 Nintendo. © Ambit 2017.



## 1. THE LEGEND OF ZELDA ENCYCLOPEDIA

On hardback for £23.45 or Kindle for £18.99 from Dark Horse comes this massive 320 page, full colour, luxury encyclopaedia, covering every *Zelda* game except *Breath of the Wild*.

## 2. CARDFIGHT!! VANGUARD BOOSTER

A new booster for *Cardfight!! Vanguard* has just gone on sale at the beginning of the month for £3.99. *Cardfight!! Vanguard* Extra Booster 01: The Destructive Roar features units from three distinctive clans, and a new ability for Tachikaze! Head to [en.cf-vanguard.com](http://en.cf-vanguard.com) for the latest news on products.

## 3. POKÉMON POWER ACTION PIKACHU

This deluxe, huggable Pikachu features sensor technology so you can squeeze his hands to interact and make him speak! He even has a light-up tail. Available online, prices vary.

## 4. GENKI GEAR GAMING TEE

Another fantastic design from British company GenkiGear.com! This is available now priced at £16 on ladies and unisex tees or on vest tops.

## 5. OVERWATCH BACKPACK HANGERS

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Breaking the sake cask (kagami biraki) at London's Japan Matsuri.



WORDS BY EMILY VALENTINE

# IS LONDON TURNING JAPANESE? (WE REALLY THINK SO)

JAPAN; WHERE ANCIENT traditions mix with cutting edge technology, and chic minimalism contrasts with colourful youth culture. A country of diverse landscapes; subtropical islands, vibrant cities and rugged snow-capped mountains. It should come as no surprise then that Japan is experiencing a tourism boom. In 2017, a record breaking 310,000 of us Brits travelled to Japan, and with the 2019 Rugby world cup and 2020 Tokyo Olympics just around the corner, Japan has firmly cemented its position as a tourist hotspot for the years ahead.

Here in the UK our passion for all things Japanese seems to be at an all time high. Events, exhibitions, festivals, restaurants and shops are springing up left, right and centre, and we want to experience all that Japan has to offer, from the modern to the traditional. If you can't jet off to the Land of the Rising Sun just yet, a trip to our busy, buzzy capital will give you a healthy dose of Japanese culture without having to leave the country!

## PASSION FOR POP CULTURE

We love our Japanese pop culture here in Blighty. From Hello Kitty and Pokémon to Mario and Studio Ghibli, Japan has brought us all the good stuff. Hyper Japan, the UK's largest Japanese cultural event, now in its eighth year, is more popular than ever. Filling huge London venues like Tobacco Dock and

Olympia, it's a magnet for people from all walks of life wanting to get their fix of cosplay, fashion, music, martial arts, gaming, food and shopping.

## CULTURE CULTURE

If it's tradition you're after, then the newly opened Japan House in Kensington might be your cup of (green) tea. Described by London Mayor Sadiq Khan as a "window into Japanese culture" this spectacular space is home to an exhibition gallery, library, travel centre, restaurant and retail floor, bringing visitors authentic insights into Japan. London also hosts an annual matsuri (festival) in Trafalgar Square every September with music and entertainment, colourful *mikoshi* (decorated floats), martial arts and lots of delicious food. The Embassy of Japan in the UK and organisations like Daiwa Foundation also host regular Japanese events, exhibitions and talks too. Culture buffs are really spoilt for choice!

## LEARNING THE LINGO

Whether you want to watch your favourite anime in Japanese, converse with locals in Japan or learn more about Japanese culture, there are more options available to you than ever before. Chika Nakagawa, Japanese tutor at City Lit in London has been teaching Japanese for over 25 years and has seen her





Experience authentic Japanese culture at Japan House in Kensington. Image by Lee Mawdsley.



Shop 'til you drop at Ichiba, Europe's largest Japanese food hall. By Steven Joyce.



Salivate over sumptuous sushi. London Japanese eateries serve everything from street food to fine dining.



Pop culture fans will love Hyper Japan, London's largest J-Culture event.



Ichiba, Europe's largest Japanese food hall opened in London in July. By Steven Joyce.



Small but perfectly formed, Japanese sweets (wagashi) are just one of the tasty treats you can sample in London.

#### MAIL ORDER JAPAN-STYLE

If you can't get yourself to the capital, fear not, for you can order plenty of Japanese goodies, from sake and bento boxes, to rice and magazines, direct to your door via [www.JapanCentre.com](http://www.JapanCentre.com)!

students and their tastes change over the years. "My first classes in the 1990s were dominated by business people. By the 2000s, classes were more diverse and started to reflect broader interests in Japanese music, film and literature". The college now offers classes in things like etiquette and eating sushi alongside language courses. Our eagerness to learn more about Japan's fascinating culture is on the rise!

## A TASTE OF JAPAN

Japan isn't all sushi and noodles you know (although both are delicious of course...). If you've never tasted *wagashi* (ornamental sweets made from rice paste) or sunk your teeth into *okonomiyaki* (savory pizza / pancake creation topped with tangy Bulldog sauce and mayo) then you've been seriously missing out. London is home to hundreds of Japanese restaurants to suit every budget, from cafes serving Japanese street food to fine dining restaurants where you can indulge in sumptuous *kaiseki* (multi course) style meals prepared by top chefs.

## SHOP 'TIL YOU DROP

Japan is a country of contrasts, and it's not only *kawaii* (cute) culture that sells. It seems we also can't get enough of the simple, functional side of Japanese design either. Head to the high street and it won't be long before you stumble

across a Muji or a Uniqlo selling understated items for the home and simple, stylish fashion basics. Not a clashing colour or cute character in sight!

If you want to shop 'til you drop Japan style, then make a beeline for Japan Centre's flagship store on Panton Street, or the shiny new Ichiba store in Westfields; the largest Japanese food hall in Europe. Fill your shopping bag with everything from miso to matcha, along with all your favourite Japanese sweets and snacks, books and magazines, beauty products and items for the home.

## LEAVING ON A JET PLANE

If you're ready to book those plane tickets and head over to the Land of the Rising Sun then you're in for a treat. Japan has it all, from volcanoes, hot springs and wildlife, to sandy beaches, mountains and buzzing cities.

Japan Journeys offers a variety of guided tours that we can definitely recommend, including the Japan Summer Manga Tour which takes you to some of Tokyo's hottest otaku spots, or the Gardens of Japan Tour, which is a more genteel look at some of the most exquisite outdoor spaces in Japan during the maple season and includes a night on Miyajima island! There are even Bonsai, Quilt and Cherry Blossom viewing tours, or the company can put together a bespoke, self-guided package if you'd prefer. Check out [www.japanjourneys.co.uk](http://www.japanjourneys.co.uk) to book. ●



# ANIME EXPOSÉ

# FLCL PROGRESSIVE

Let's go crazy!



THE SUMMER ANIME TV season began in July – see right for some new titles – but we’ve not been able to see much of it as of writing. Consequently, we’re looking at two anime that carried over into summer. *FLCL Progressive* ended in early July, while *Steins;Gate 0* (over the page) will run through the summer season. Both anime are holdovers in another way; they’re sequels to standout series from many years ago. Of course that means they’ll grab fan attention, but they also have lots to live up to.

As of writing, *FLCL Progressive* isn’t streaming on UK platforms; this is a preview from America, where it’s aired on the Toonami block. Many British fans will know the first *FLCL*, or “Fooly Cooly” as it’s often called. Almost 20 years old, it came out in 2000 as a six-part video series. It was co-produced by two huge-name studios, Gainax and Production I.G, which were each coming off international head-turners, *Ghost in the Shell* and *Evangelion*. *FLCL* was a crazy comedy anime, perhaps the crazy comedy anime. If you’ve not seen it, you can get it on Blu-ray and DVD from MVM.

*FLCL* looks like *Ground Zero* for the strand of wild anime now associated with Studio Trigger – *Kill la Kill* is the obvious comparison. Indeed, *Kill la Kill*’s future director Hiroyuki Imaishi was part of the *FLCL* team; he had multiple credits, including storyboarding and animation. It also has a similar vibe to the wackier work of another director, Masaaki Yuasa. *FLCL* would make a hell of a double bill with Yuasa’s early *Mind Game*.

The original *FLCL* was a rush. Even at over two hours, it was an exhaustingly fast sprint, crammed with relentless, hammering gags, both visual and verbal. It was anime’s equivalent of a motormouth stand-up session by Robin Williams, full of nonsensical swerves and mazes and scarily intense delivery. You probably wouldn’t “get” half of *FLCL*’s babbling on first viewing, but it hypnotised all the same. The story hardly seemed to matter, though it involves the arrival of a mad woman on a motorbike, Haruko, who turns the life of an unsuspecting boy to chaos.

*FLCL* spoofed the “magic girlfriend” format, with the perverse twist that Haruko was far more adult than the boy she tortured, spicing up the show no end (she also goes after the lad’s dad). *FLCL* further demonstrated, like *Akira* and *Evangelion* before it, how much fun anime could have with teen body-horror. In *FLCL*, a pointy horn thrusts out of the boy’s forehead, and that’s only the precursor for far grosser and weirder things to erupt from the human body. Ah, puberty.

## MEH MADNESS

In 2015, it was announced that Production I.G had bought the *FLCL* rights – including specifically the sequel rights – from the ailing Studio Gainax. There are, in fact, two new *FLCL* series this year, six parts each. The recently-ended *FLCL Progressive* will be followed by *FLCL Alternative*, which will screen in





"THE ORIGINAL *FLCL* WAS ANIME'S EQUIVALENT OF A MOTORMOUTH STAND-UP SESSION BY ROBIN WILLIAMS, FULL OF SWERVES AND MAZES AND SCARILY INTENSE DELIVERY."



America in September. To confuse matters, there was a surprise early showing of *Alternative*'s first part on Toonami in April, weeks before the "earlier" *Progressive* commenced.

But we'll focus on *Progressive*. It's ostensibly a continuation of *FLCL*'s mayhem, albeit with largely new characters. But Haruko is back; she's after the same alien McGuffin as last time, which means that she plagues two new teenagers. Hidomi, a girl, seems to have a chronically repressed personality; could the stylish headphones she always wears be to blame? Ko, a boy, seems frankly a cipher, ceding centre stage to Haruko and her new superwoman rival, the humourless Jinyu. Soon there are weird-shaped monsters running around, and any number of blockbuster battles.

This column usually makes only provisional judgements, but we have to say *Progressive* seemed rather pointless; a diversion at best, as opposed to the electrodes-to-brain shock of the original. Most obviously, *Progressive* is far less manic and

alarming than the first *FLCL* or its revved-up contemporaries. It's generically crazy, not *really* crazy. Even when *Progressive* does get lively, especially in the later episodes, it still feels like a tepid cover of the original.

And maybe this disappointing sequel to a Gainax anime inadvertently gives us the reason why *another* ex-Gainax anime is taking so long to finish. If you're an old-time anime fan, you'll remember how mind-frazzling the various ends of *Evangeliion* were in the 1990s. First, the final episodes of the TV version had competing shouts of "Avant-garde brilliance!" and "Therapy-speak drive!" echoing across online bulletin boards. Then the *End of Evangelion* film dissolved characters and viewers alike into a sea of crimson goo.

Now imagine you're trying to make *Evangeliion 4.0* two decades later, and top all of *that*. When you're trying to live up to the legacy of a mind-blowing experimental anime, the most terrifying sound in the universe is the audience going "Meh...". ●

## ALSO STREAMING...



### BANANA FISH

Although this series isn't a sequel, it still has big expectations resting on it. It's adapted from an acclaimed manga serial published in the 1980s, about Ash Lynx, the teenage leader of a New York street gang. While the manga hasn't been animated before, its female author Akimi Yoshida was successfully adapted to the screen just a few years ago; her manga *Umimachi Diary* became the live-action film *Our Little Sister*, directed by Hirokazu Kore-eda. Can *Banana Fish* live up to that?



### ANGOLMOIS: RECORD OF MONGOL INVASION

When we covered *Golden Kamuy* last issue, we commented there were very few anime stories set in pre-20th century Japanese history that didn't have a sci-fi or fantasy spin. As if to prove us wrong, here's another one! It's an adventure story set in the 12th century, about characters trying to fend off a Mongolian invasion of Japan (well, you've read the title). The defenders include former pirates and criminals, and the young princess of a small island directly in the invaders' path...



### CHIO'S SCHOOL ROAD

After street gangs and hairy historical invasions, it's time for some school-girl-centred whimsy. Based on what we've seen of it so far, this comedy series centres on the title teen Chio negotiating her daily problems as if they're computer-game puzzles. In particular, there's the challenge of getting to school in the morning, which puts Chio into numerous amusing scrapes. We've seen this kind of thing done in anime as cruel comedy – remember *WATAMOTE?* – but *Chio* looks to be much gentler fare.



# ANIME EXPOSÉ

# STEINS;GATE 0

After the Bad End



*STEINS;GATE 0*'s choice of numeral makes it sound like a prequel, maybe an origin. Actually, it's a *sequel* to the first *Steins;Gate* anime from 2011, though an unconventional sequel; let's call it a quasi-sequel, an alternate-sequel, an almost-sequel. Anyone who's weathered the continuity in the *Blue Exorcist* or *Tokyo Ghoul* anime will be used to such shenanigans.

If you've not encountered *Steins;Gate* before, we *don't* recommend starting with *0*, but rather with the excellent original anime, available on UK home formats and Netflix. Moreover, it's pretty impossible to talk about *0* without spoilers for the first *Steins;Gate*, so be warned.

You may have heard about the passing of Harlan Ellison, a feted American science-fiction / fantasy author, who died this June. Ellison was famous, and infamous, for many reasons, but he's especially well-known for conceiving the most acclaimed episode of *Star Trek*, a 1967 story called *The City on the Edge of Forever*. The version that appeared on screen was different from the story Ellison wrote, but the idea at its heart was the same.

*City* is a time-travel story in which William Shatner's Captain Kirk comes to two shattering discoveries. One, he's fallen hopelessly in love with a woman. Two; history has been distorted and to set it on its proper course, *he must let the woman die*. Of course, that's the central dilemma in *Steins;Gate* as well. Thank heaven Ellison didn't see it; his appetite for litigation was legendary, as any *Terminator* fan will tell you.

In the first *Steins;Gate*, the time-traveller was the teenage Okabe, a self-styled "mad scientist" operating from his bodged-up lab in Tokyo's geekiest

district, Akihabara. Amid electronics shops and maid cafes, Okabe created time-travel. The woman he fell for was his fellow scientist, the brilliant brown-haired Kurisu. Like Kirk, Okabe learned his soulmate was destined to die, *had* to die. In the first series, at least on its original broadcast (see boxout), the Ellison-style dilemma was resolved in a mad, memorable way.

*Steins;Gate 0*, though, asks what if things had ended *differently*. The new series supposes that 95% of the things in *Steins;Gate* "happened" – well, kind of happened, as the only person who remembers most of them now is Okabe, who's rewritten history more times than *Doctor Who*. But *Steins;Gate* proposes that, in the middle of part 23 of the first series, things zagged when they should have zigged. A fateful decision was made. Rather than being pepped up by his friends for a final wild effort, Okabe was allowed to sink into defeat. Which means...

## HOW IT SHOULDN'T HAVE ENDED.

... that *Steins;Gate 0* starts with a *broken* Okabe. As a time-traveller, he's failed on two levels. He's failed to save his beloved Kurisu; he's also failed to stop a chain of events that will – a few years ahead in the future – kill billions of people in a world war. Okabe is no longer an arrogant, shouty, energised mad scientist. Rather, he's a haunted and subdued man who's switched his flowing white lab coat for funereal dark suits that age him decades. It's the most shocking makeover we've ever seen in anime.

Okabe's transformation is highlighted by how much everyone else *hasn't* changed. Except for Kurisu, the whole gang is here: there's the trilling Mayuri,





## First Iteration

The original *Steins;Gate* serial was broadcast in Japan in 2011, running 24 episodes. A 25th part was made for video, and is included in the UK home and Netflix editions. There was also a feature film sequel made in 2013, with the hefty subtitle, *Load Region of Déjà Vu*. This film was released by Funimation in America, but it's never had a UK release, though it did have a screening at the Scotland Loves Anime festival in 2013.

## Second Iteration

Subsequently, the original TV series was re-screened on Japanese TV in 2015, but with a crucial difference. This time, part 23 was the final episode, and its second half was changed completely; it skewed the story into an entirely new ending, setting up *Steins;Gate 0* (it ends with a glimpse of the virtual Kurisu). It was an audacious trick, though perhaps the *Steins;Gate* team were encouraged by the cinema versions of *Evangelion* in the 2000s, and how *they* skewed their source material.

1. The ambiguous figure of Moeka, returning in a new guise. 2. This is how hero Okabe feels most of the time these days. 3. Okabe shares a moment of peace with his childhood friend Mayuri.

the otaku Daru, Luka, Faris and many more. Some of these people *know* about Okabe's terrible adventures, but they didn't *experience* them; he wiped that slate clean. His friends still live cheery lives around Okabe's darkness. He's like Homura in *Madoka Magica*. Moreover, Suzuha's still around, the time-travelling girl from a terrible future. She's a living reminder of Okabe's failures, and she's not prepared to accept his anguished insistence that he's done with changing history.

Only Kurisu is irretrievably gone, except... Early in the series, Okabe runs into some of her former science colleagues, and learns Kurisu was involved in experiments with A.I. Incredibly, there's a talking, arguing simulation of Kurisu online, who traumatises Okabe all over again with her realism – compare the *Black Mirror* episode, *Be Right Back*.

Later, a girl who looks extraordinarily *like* Kurisu turns up with amnesia and a past bound up with the future. Her true identity is one of the show's ongoing mysteries. And then the impossible happens. Okabe starts reality-slipping again, experiencing other worlds, other possibilities, after all his fighting to solidify history. It's as if he's been cursed forever by the universe.

As for how good *0* is... As of writing, midway through the show's run, it encompasses multiple possibilities. It's been frequently engaging, sometimes very moving, and sometimes slack and pandering in how it handles its endearing cast. All this was also true of the first *Steins;Gate*, a series which only revealed its full brilliant design in its later episodes. In a show all about endings going wrong, it would be terrible if *0* fell foul of one itself... ●



## THE GAMES

All the *Steins;Gate* anime are spin-offs from a visual novel game. Developed by 5pb. and Nitroplus, it was released in 2009 and is available in English on various platforms. *Steins;Gate 0* also originated as a game in 2015. Both games have complex diverging storylines and umpteen possible endings, while other *Steins;Gate* spinoff games found still more ways to take the story. They are part of the "Science Adventure" series, which includes the game versions of *Chaos;Head*, *Robotics;Notes* and *Chaos;Child*.



# KAWADOKO: CHILLING LIKE A SAMURAI

Mark Guthrie escapes Kyoto's humidity through a combination of tradition, innovation and sake

THERE IS SOMETHING inherently magical about Kyoto, Japan's Imperial city. With its gleaming golden temple, its elegantly coiffured geisha and its refined food, the one-time capital is the foundation upon which the very idea of Japanese culture is built.

But then the summer months come to Japan's most humid city, at which time the scent of the blooming hydrangeas is masked by the musk of sweaty salarymen and the sound of the *shamisen* is drowned out by the continuous lament of "atsui neeee" (it's sooooo hot!). For an émigré from England's north east with a pallor and heat intolerance to match, Kyoto in summer is no picnic. Put frankly, it's muggier than a great steaming mug of miso soup in a sumo wrestler's loincloth.

Of course, there are ways of combating the heat. In offices stuffy suits are replaced by 'cool biz wear', and every room reverberates to the thrum of aircon. Yet this has not always been the case, and in less technologically advanced times Kyotoites had to find alternative ways of beating the heat. One such innovation was *kawadoko*.

## RIDING THE WAVES

Like much of Japan's celebrated cultural heritage, *kawadoko* – essentially, riverside dining – has its roots in the Edo Period. Catering to the desire of high-ranking samurai and affluent merchants wishing to cool off as they dined, riverside restaurants took to extending their buildings with bamboo terraces over the water's edge, lined them with soft tatami mats and sheltered them from the scorching sun. From here patrons indulged in exquisite *kaiseki ryori*, the traditional multi-course haute cuisine favoured by aristocratic Japanese, while the river ran beneath them, wafting a cooling breeze as it did so.

Like many such cultural remnants of the bygone era, to this day the custom of *kawadoko* has been kept alive by locals who enjoy revelling in their historical culture, and each summer the restaurants that line Kyoto's Kamo River are filled by Kyotoites seeking not only respite from the relentless heat, but also delicious local delicacies.

"LIKE MANY SUCH CULTURAL REMNANTS OF THE BYGONE ERA, TO THIS DAY THE CUSTOM OF KAWADOKO HAS BEEN KEPT ALIVE BY LOCALS WHO ENJOY REVELLING IN THEIR HISTORICAL CULTURE, AND EACH SUMMER THE RESTAURANTS THAT LINE KYOTO'S KAMO RIVER ARE FILLED BY KYOTOITES SEEKING NOT ONLY RESPITE FROM THE RELENTLESS HEAT, BUT ALSO DELICIOUS LOCAL DELICACIES."

However, while there are plenty of restaurants that offer this service, the traditional form of *kawadoko* in the city has changed from its original incarnation. Following historical regulatory changes that limited access to the Kamogawa, even the most exclusive of restaurants today can offer only *noryodoko*, or *noryoyuka* dining experiences – essentially alfresco dining, with seating some distance from the water's edge. While undoubtedly a beautiful site, it doesn't quite have the desired cooling effect that pasty northerners like myself require; for such individuals, it is necessary to head for the hills.

## DINING WITH DEITIES

Legend has it that some 1600 years ago the goddess Princess Tamayori, mother of Japan's legendary first emperor, Jimmu, floated upriver from Osaka Bay on a yellow boat, eventually coming to rest at the site of the present-day town of Kibune. Here the villagers built Kifune shrine (and no, that's not a typo, both the village and the shrine share the same *kanji* characters, but the town is pronounced 'Kibune' and the shrine 'Kifune', because, well, Japanese can be weird like that) in which they enshrined Takaokami no Kami, the god of water provision. Ever since, the river that flows through it has been of great importance to the town.

This is particularly true in the summer months when the cool mountain air is complimented by the rushing flow of the waters swollen by the recent rainy season, and this sleepy, picturesque mountain village becomes a mecca for Kyotoites and tourists. Yet these pilgrims come worshipping not ancient gods, but the glory of *kaiseki ryori*.

Kibune is home to a large number of restaurants and traditional ryokan hotels at which those who wish to enjoy *kawadoko* in its most perfect form gather. Clad in summer *yukata* kimono, diners take their positions on legless *zaisu* chairs, backsides cooled by the waters running mere inches below their tatami seats, so close that those in external tables can literally dangle their feet in the icy-cold water rushing below.

## KNOW YOUR ONIONS. OR MUSHROOMS, AT THE LEAST

Depending on the restaurant, course or time of the season, dishes customers receive can vary, so it pays to put in some research. Most places will serve decorative, plump sashimi as well as grilled *ayu*, a sweet fish captured from the very river that flows beneath the restaurant, and, if you can find it, grilled daggertooth pike conger eel comes highly recommended. While that doesn't sound particularly appetising to British ears, thanks to its high price and the beautiful peony shape in which it is served, there is nothing more synonymous with Kyoto fine dining than *hamo*.

Should your knowledge of Japanese cuisine be patchy, it is recommended that you bring someone who knows their stuff. Woe betide you if you munch your way through your eye-wateringly expensive *matsutake* mushrooms as if they were a side dish on a service station fry up with barely a cursory squeal of "oiitishiiiiiii" (delicious). A reputation for being a culinary ignoramus is one that you will never shake off, take my word for it.

But, even if that were to happen, there is a good chance that you will be inured to the embarrassment by both the helpings of sake and the calming effect of the rushing waters below. In fact, the only thing that will concern you is the nagging realisation that, sooner rather than later, you'll have to leave the lanterns dancing in the cool mountain breeze and the fireflies glowing in the riverbeds behind, and return to the humidity of the city below. ●



(Licensed by CC by 2.0 bit.ly/2Nj1l6u. Image by mshades.)



Image by Naoki Inoko



Image by Hunter Byron Smith



1. When cultures collide: Starbucks getting in on the noryodoko game. 2. Alfresco dining doesn't get much better. 3. Daggertooth pike conger eels (right) look much prettier as sashimi. 4. I'm not sure if samurai had desserts like this, but is that a ninja star on top...? 5. Do not. Fall. In!

Image by Hunter Byron Smith



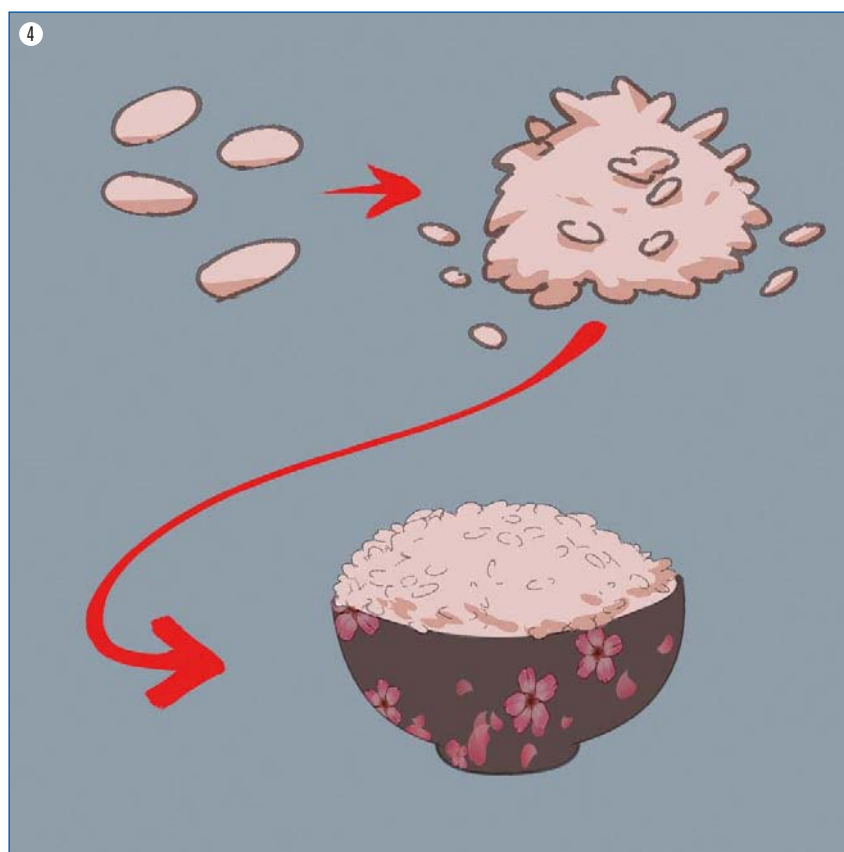
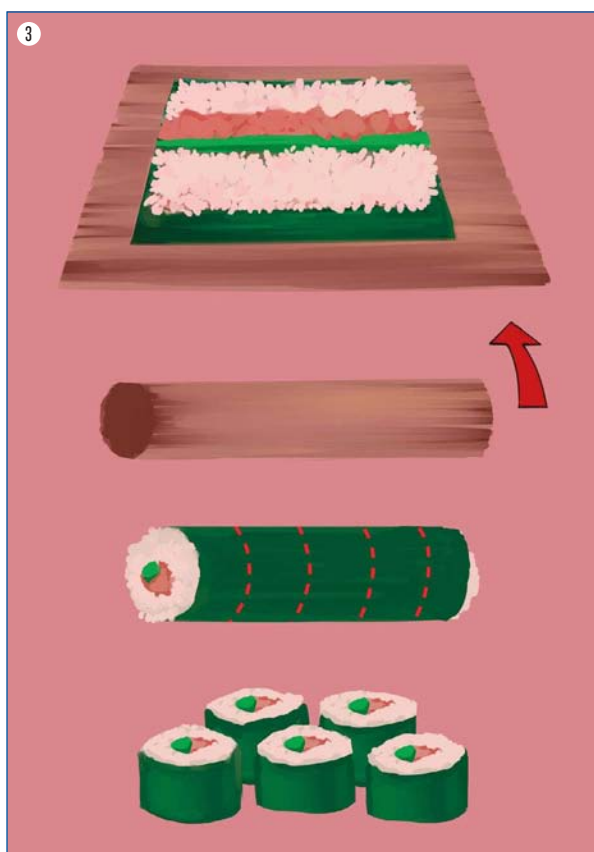
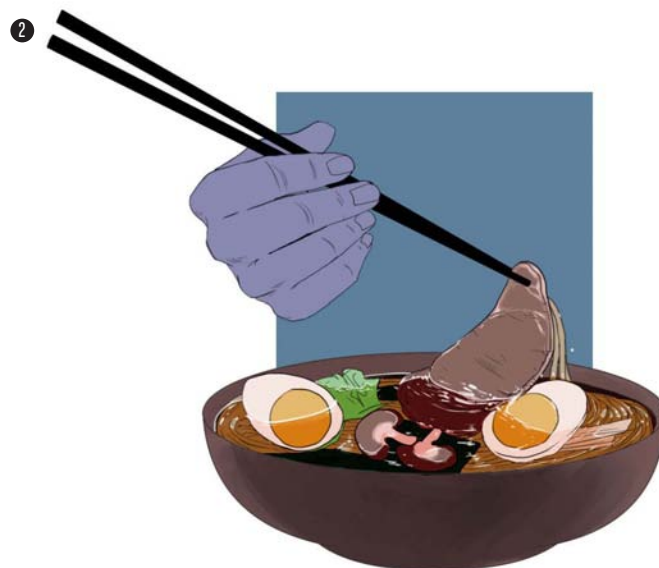
Image by Naoki Inoko



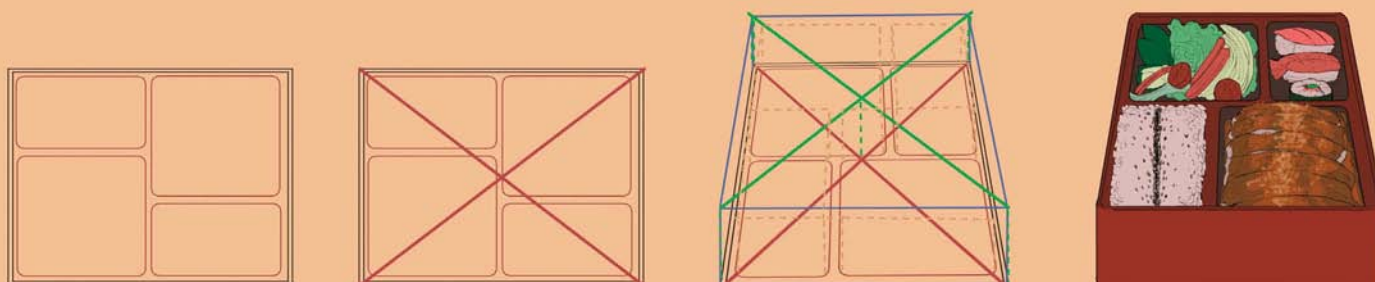
# MANGA SCHOOL with Leeann Hamilton

## JAPANESE SNACKS

JAPANESE FOOD INCLUDES ONIGIRI (RICE BALLS) AND GYOZA (DUMPLINGS), NOT TO MENTION SUSHI, ALL THE WAY UP TO HEARTY MEALS LIKE RAMEN AND KATSU CURRY. WHAT'S NOTABLE ABOUT JAPANESE FOOD IS NOT JUST THE VARIETY, BUT THAT EACH DISH HAS AN ORDERLY PRESENTATION AND PATTERN THAT MAKES IT SO ICONIC. LET'S BREAK THESE DOWN TO THEIR BASIC INGREDIENTS AND DRAW THEM!







## 1. BASIC SHAPES AND SERVING SIZES

Japanese meals are served compartmentalised – each portion having their own bowl or section – and all at once, as appetisers don't exactly exist in Japanese cuisine. However if we consider sushi, gyoza, tempura and the like as a type of *tapas* or pub food, it's easier to understand how they're eaten.

An izakaya is a famous Japanese example of a place serving snacks with drinks (the eating places with the huge red lanterns outside), and these snacks are often considered as appetisers in Japanese restaurants located in the west. So it's okay to just order those even if you aren't going to eat a big meal afterwards!

## 2. VARIETY IS THE SPICE

In bigger meals such as ramen, the presentation is more about contrasts. Ramen, when it's broken down, is noodles with a stock soup, and meat and vegetables stacked on top. Simple right? But then you have to take into consideration that the

contents of ramen change with the region or with the restaurant that serves it. I found that in Kyoto, many ramen dishes had sliced pork belly, but in Tokyo the dishes had more seafood. You might find a range of choices in the next Japanese restaurant you visit, but many restaurants stick to a few trusty recipes depending on what they can get locally, while keeping the same soup and noodles base.

## 3. TONE, TASTE, TEXTURE, TRIANGULATION?

In many of my tutorials, I emphasise that one should start drawing broadly and break it down to the details, versus drawing tiny details first. The same is somewhat true about making sushi. (A cylinder it cameth from, a cylinder it returnth to.)

When we want to draw 3D forms, we need to think of the form as a 'filled' volume, versus anticipating 2D lineart on paper. Using norimaki sushi as an example, the real details shine when, after being rolled tightly, the sushi is cut into

segments and arranged so you can see, and enjoy, the contents within.

## 4. DRAWING THE DETAILS, UNSWEATED

What if the tiny detail is the bit that needs drawing the most? Let's take rice as an example, as it's a huge staple of many Asian dishes. Rice is a grain (and grains are fruit!), and having to draw each rice grain would be insanity. Again, we must look at our food drawing as a whole.

It would make sense to draw each grain on an extreme close up. Zoom out from a tiny pile of rice, and it looks more like a solid collective. You can render this as a solid object, but with a handful of lines and shapes to imply the 3D-ness of the rice.

## 5. LUNCH TIME

The bento is an iconic staple of Japanese food, and is often served with a bowl of rice and miso soup on the side. But its main feature is the compartments that keep several mini-meals snug and neat, ones that also include salad and pieces of sushi.

To draw a convincing bento, it's easier to make a 'floor plan' of the compartments first – some boxes have about four or five sections.

Imagine an X intersecting the bento plan. When drawing the bento in 3D this will keep the size of the compartments consistent.

Draw a box in perspective, starting with the bottom of the box and then drawing in the top right above it. Draw the X that joins the edges of the bottom box, and, comparing where the compartments meet along the X in the floor plan, apply the shapes there. This will also give depth to the bento when these compartments are drawn on the 'top' part. Now fill the bento with treats!

## CHAMELEON PENS

Chameleon Color Tones is an innovative marker system, where a single marker allows you to achieve multiple tones. Initially launching the highly acclaimed Deluxe Set, a pack of 20 markers allowing you to get over 100 tones, and the new palette of 30 new colours (50 in total) will leave artists with near endless possibilities.

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[ANIME REVIEW]

# BLACK CLOVER SEASON ONE PART ONE

Big on magic, short on charm

20 AUGUST // SONY PICTURES HOME ENTERTAINMENT, FUNIMATION // 12 // FANTASY // £36.99 (DUAL FORMAT) // 240 MINS // 10 EPISODES

**PLOT** In a world where magic is everywhere, unlucky Asta has no magical powers of his own. But he doesn't let that stop him from attending the trials to join the fabled Magic Knights alongside his childhood pal and rival Yuno, for they've both sworn to become the next Wizard King!

**C**reated by mangaka Yuki Tabata, *Black Clover* debuted in the pages of *Weekly Shonen Jump* before being brought to the screen by the anime studio Pierrot. That's the company behind *Naruto Shippuden* and *Boruto: Naruto Next Generations* and it's all too clear that *Black Clover* is intended to appeal to precisely the same demographic.

In the early episodes, it feels like Tabata is checking off a list of the elements that make *Naruto* popular, substituting the word 'wizard' for 'ninja' where appropriate. There's the headband-wearing, spiky-haired hero who is an orphan with big dreams of becoming the Wizard King and who measures himself against his sullen and serious friend / rival. Like *Naruto*, Asta is determined to prove that even an orphan can climb to the top if they are willing to work hard enough. Their impulsive personalities are similar, although anyone who found Junko Takeuchi's voice grating as *Naruto*

will meet their match here. As Asta, Gakuto Kajiwara delivers one of the shrillest performances in all anime, shrieking his dialogue in a most exhausting manner. The idea seems to be that loud is the same as funny, so if Asta just keeps screaming each thought as it crosses his mind, the result will be unbridled hilarity. Alas, the idea does not hold up to scrutiny.

The worldbuilding is an odd mixture of fantasy elements with more familiar ingredients. Having established a world based in magic where the first Wizard King is a messianic figure who saved humanity from a terrible demon, the series inexplicably features a great deal of Christian imagery. Asta and Yuno are raised by a priest and Asta has a childhood crush on Sister Lily, who is a nun. Where does Christ fit in with a world rescued from demons by a wizard? It's not clear that creator Tabata has thought this through, and has cast Lily as a nun, complete with a habit and crucifix, simply to make her unattainable.

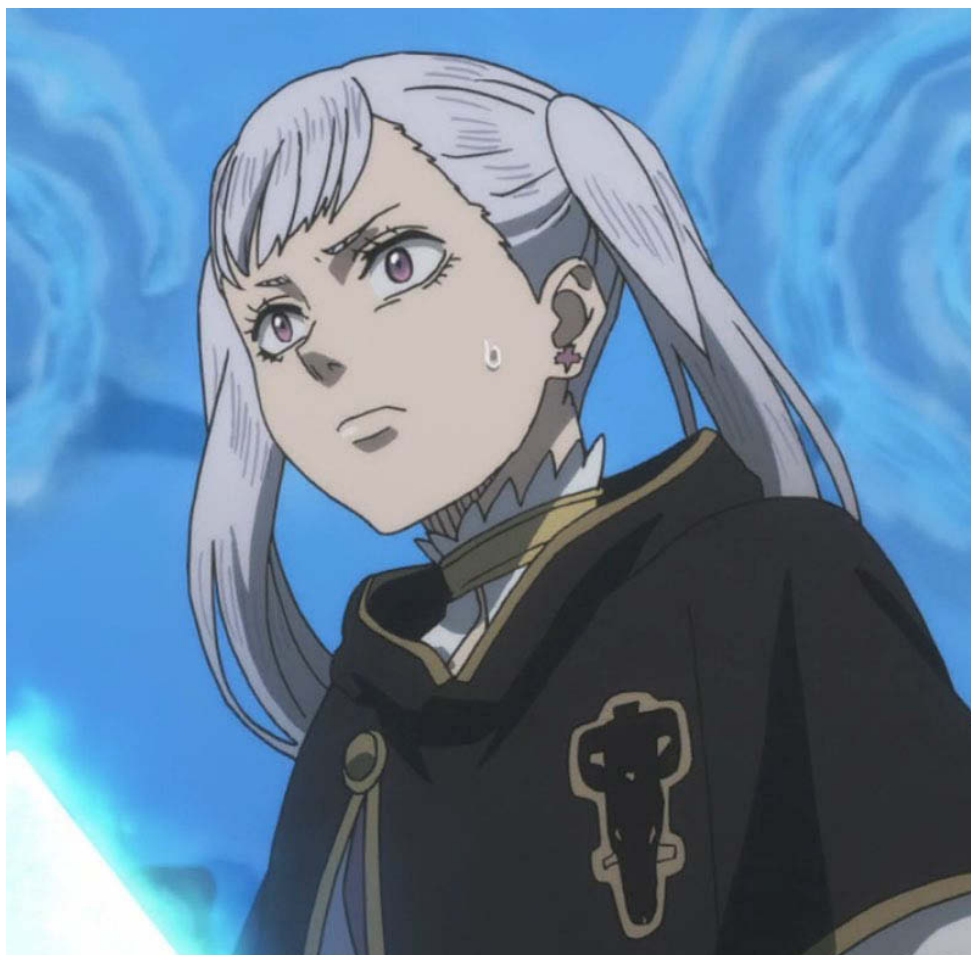
The pacing and visuals vary from episode to episode, likely a reflection of the fact that there's a different director at the helm on almost every episode within this first instalment, and often a different storyboard artist too. Episode three, during which Asta and Yuno travel to the capital city, practically feels like filler, which is ridiculous so early in the series.

The scripts don't always help either. There is too much reliance on the use of internal monologues to explain what people are thinking and feeling, even when a character

## IF YOU LIKE THIS

If you enjoy impulsive youthful heroes with spiky hair, then check out *Fairy Tail*, *Soul Eater* and *Blue Exorcist*. To add gore to the mix, see *Deadman Wonderland*.





appears for the first time, which makes it seem like the narrative point of view is constantly shifting around. Episode four is guilty of dumping exposition onto the viewer and introducing too many new names and faces all at once for most of them to make a lasting impression.

Production values are fair to middling. So far *Black Clover* has yet to feature a standout action scene, despite being a *Weekly Shonen Jump* title with a premise about

**"IT'S NOT ENOUGH FOR ASTA TO KEEP SHOUTING ABOUT BECOMING THE WIZARD KING. WHAT STANDS IN HIS WAY? HE NEEDS A WORTHY ENEMY."**

Magic Knights defending the kingdom from evil. Episode four has a burst of action at the end, but it arrives after such a long build up and is resolved so quickly that it feels like the punchline of a shaggy dog story. The villain in the opening story arc is animated with style, as a leering, wild-eyed lunatic who could have come from a Madhouse production. Compare that to Lord Heath, the villain of the final two episodes here, who is thoroughly bland in both design and execution, suggesting all the budget was spent early on. Similarly, every episode begins with a lengthy recap and

there are several instances where every last yen is squeezed from the footage by replaying a scene, which really feels like the animation is being padded out.

The supporting cast are defined by simple, exaggerated personality traits. There's Noelle, the snooty rich girl; loud-mouthed former delinquent Magna; Charmy who never stops eating; Luck who loves fighting; Yami, a huge, scary dude with big muscles, and so on. The clash between noisy, obnoxious Asta and calm, imperturbable Yuno works well, but Yuno effectively disappears in the second half of this batch.

This is certainly a series with plenty of potential. Asta may be shrill, but the essential foundation – young upstart with a mission – has worked very well in the past: just look at *Naruto*. What *Black Clover* needs going forwards, besides more consistent direction, is to clarify its central dramatic arc. It's not enough for Asta to keep shouting about becoming the Wizard King. What stands in his way? He needs a worthy enemy, and while this first collection hints at forces gathering in the shadows, there are too many episodes here where it feels like the series is treading water, going nowhere, but doing just enough to keep afloat.

***Black Clover* wants to be the next *Naruto* but to achieve that lofty goal, it needs to distinguish itself as more than just another run of the mill *Weekly Shonen Jump* adaptation. Stronger action scenes and some humour that doesn't rely on yelling would be a good place to start. ●**

★★★★☆

## EXTRAS

There are commentary tracks from some of the English language dub team on episodes four and seven, plus a collection of clips and highlights from this collection.



平成30年5月17日発売(奇数月17日発売)

2018

7月号

定価690円

# 50代からの私たち

巻頭カラー

黄金の庭  
**福田素子**

子どもが巣立って  
夫婦の老後がスタートする…。



～涙がとまらない!～

嫁と姑、大戦争勃発!

**汐見朝子**  
修羅の檻

高齢の母が私は恥ずかしい…

**あまねかずみ**  
暑さの夏に

高齢になっても恋をしたい女心…

**桐野さおり**  
夏の紫陽花

描き  
下ろし

三谷美佐子／川名香津美  
狩尾 堇／金井信子／宮島葉子

感動人生!  
幸せさがして

息子の自殺を受け入れられない母は…!?  
**おおにし 真**  
風は、ふ声



COME RAIN  
OR SHINE

As with many other prototype manga magazines covered in this column, it's difficult for the ad sales team to sell space to advertisers who don't know if the magazine will be a success. Respect due, then, to the Egaoplus company, who plainly thought that the back cover of a magazine promising endless tears was an ideal place to advertise their parasols.



## MANGA SNAPSHOT

# US AFTER FIFTY

Jonathan Clements gets his pipe and slippers

---

ISSUE #0 // DEBUT YEAR: 2018 // PAGE COUNT: C.500 // PUBLISHER: MEDIAX // PRICE: 690 YEN (£4.72) // CYCLE: PROTOTYPE

---

OH, THAT LOOKS nice. A silver-haired couple in each other's arms on a beach, beneath the title *Goju-dai kara no Watashitachi* (*Us After Fifty*). But wait, what does the tagline say...? "*The tears never stop!*"

And so it is with a weary, trepid sigh that I open this issue's magazine for review, another experimental publication in what is plainly regarded as a growth area in modern manga – comics for the over-50s. *Us After Fifty* (1) seems to be another spin-off from *15 Love Stories* magazine, which, as the title suggests, packs every issue with so many one-shots that it is easy to shuffle them around into more specific combinations like *Nurse Stories* (NEO 176) and hope that nobody notices.

Several of the stories in *Us at Fifty* have somewhat murky panels in their opening spreads, giving away the fact that they have appeared elsewhere in other magazines, where the opening pages were originally in colour. Ah yes, the cover promises tears, but nowhere claims to deliver all-new stories. This, of course, is not the first – we looked at the one-shot prototypes *Our Lives in Order* in NEO 147 and *Living With Illness* in NEO 158, and there may be others that even Manga Snapshot's eagle eye has failed to notice.

For what it's worth, my favourite manga series ever, in any genre, has long been *Shooting Stars in the Twilight* by Kenshi Hirokane. This endlessly inventive series has been running in *Big Comic Original* since 1995, and is now in its 57th volume. Its stories, usually timed to fit one per reprint volume, span everything from samurai drama to science fiction dystopia, Stephen King pastiches and love stories for the wheelchair-bound. All of which means that when a manga for oldies has nothing to offer but *tears*, it doesn't bode well.

But *Us at Fifty*'s cover lines promise some heavy-hitters from the women's manga world – Motoko Fukuda, Saori Kirino and Asako Shiomi to name but three. These creators have certainly won me over before in other publications – can they do it again?

Asako Shiomi's *Cage of Ashura* (2) alludes to Buddhist mythology with its evocation of a constant series of torments. Naturally, a mother-in-law is involved, depicted as a veritable demon in the home for whom nothing is ever good enough – finding hair in the rice, making her daughter-in-law sleep in the barn "like a servant".

It starts oh-so-innocently, with a demand for a cup of tea, and soon escalates into tearful kitchen recriminations. Our hard-pressed Cinderella heroine, Yoko, doesn't just have to skivvy away in her absent husband's family home, she also has to fight off the wandering hands of her senile father-in-law (who keeps groping her and calling her Yumiko). She frets about the influence of the toxic environment on her daughter Ami, and is tormented even in her sleep by nightmares in a family that permanently finds fault.

We've been here before so often that your correspondent even coined the term "in-law appeasement" for such dramas. And *Cage of Ashura* is a fine example of the genre, albeit an example that is given seven times in this issue, which contains episodes 8-14 of a manga that already can be found on Amazon Japan in four compilation volumes. Your mileage may vary, but some 20% of this entire magazine, fully half a notional compilation volume, is taken up with this single manga story, which makes it feel like bulk filler and stealth advertising, rather than a carefully curated set of tales. A reprint's a reprint, I suppose, but since the protagonist Yoko is no older than her early 30s, I question what it's doing in a collection called *Us After Fifty* at all.

## GOLDEN YEARS

Motoko Fukuda's *Golden Garden* (3) begins with a shot of blossoms on a branch (4), and a comment that human life passes through four seasons. And we, says the narrator, are now in early autumn. Reiko and her husband are just getting ready to enjoy a "second life" now that their daughter has moved out. They celebrate hubby's birthday with sake and cake, only for him to suffer a sudden stroke. Well, not that sudden – three years pass in the gap in the panels between him scoffing a birthday treat, and Reiko getting a call from the hospital, as manga author Fukuda masterfully compresses her narrative. For Reiko, it feels like yesterday that they were happy, and now her husband is an angry invalid, grumpy at his rehab and struggling even to write his own name.

Fukuda's artwork takes a hyper-real turn for the worst – her depiction of her own characters deforming and flubbing as if the artwork itself is struggling to tell the story (5). Rehabilitation is implied through a return to more realistic lines by the >>>





# FLOWER POWER

The *ajisai* flower is not merely a hydrangea, it's *hydrangea macrophylla*, native to Japan and popular among Japanese gardeners. It also seems to have anti-malarial and anti-microbial properties, making *ajisai* tea popular with elderly drinkers. Scientists are investigating the possibility that it also might lessen the symptoms of diabetes.

>>> final pages, but realism also infuses their closing homilies. Everybody has an end, like this story has an end. The best they can do is try to enjoy the golden light on the garden, as they head off to a little home in the country.

Fukuda's story is melancholy but not maudlin. Her characters face real issues, and the feel-good ending is tinged with looming tragedy. But that's her point – it's what's in store for us all.

*Summer Hydrangeas* (6) by Saori Kirino doesn't get too deeply into first name terms, the surnames and honorifics of polite Japanese making it clear just how far away its characters are from true intimacy. Miss Takamiya is in her 50s, and is trying to get out and about after five years wallowing in widowhood. She soon develops a crush on Mr Iwase, the handsome but specky potter who teaches a class at the local village hall. The two of them enjoy a chaste meal together when they accidentally bump into each other on the way home, and Mrs Takamiya cluelessly tries to remember how to flirt. She confesses to her coffee morning pals that she met her late husband at an *omiai* – a staged, formal dinner run by marriage brokers – meaning that she never really worked out how to do dating. Does Mr Iwase like her? Is he just being nice? She really doesn't know, and Kirino charmingly captures the youthful clumsiness that Mrs Takamiya never knew that she had.

And yes, it does all end in tears, but only because Mr Iwase switches schools, and waves off his old class with a merry but impersonal farewell. Mrs Takamiya is devastated, but Kirino's message is oddly uplifting. If she can feel pain, she can feel love, and she is still young at heart.

Despite the maudlin threats of its cover lines, *Us at Fifty* delivers some classy tales of love and loss for the generation that



"BUT *US AT FIFTY'S* COVER LINES PROMISE SOME HEAVY-HITTERS FROM THE WOMEN'S MANGA WORLD – MOTOKO FUKUDA, SAORI KIRINO AND ASAKO SHIOMI TO NAME BUT THREE. THESE CREATORS HAVE CERTAINLY WON ME OVER BEFORE IN OTHER PUBLICATIONS – CAN THEY DO IT AGAIN?"

was born in the late 1960s. The biggest blurb on the cover, in fact, apart from the title itself, promises "an emotional life in search of happiness," which more aptly summarises its recurring emphasis on making the best of whatever hand life has dealt you. A pragmatic and realistic attitude for the over-50s, but somehow I don't see this title being the one to truly crack open the field for oldies' manga. However, in cherry-picking some well-told and often rather inventive stories from some of the queens of women's manga, it's still a very reasonable read, tears and all. ● >>>





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## DEATH IN THE FAMILY

MAKOTO ONISHI'S *A Voice Carried by the Wind* turns the melodrama in the magazine up to 11. Even its strapline is a tear-jerker: "When her eldest son dies, a mother's heart dies, too." The titular mother isn't even named – the surname on the family grave tells us that she is Mrs Kinnai, but that detail might pass a casual reader by. Her very anonymity becomes a powerful rhetorical device, daring the reader to imagine herself in her shoes, as she struggles through the funeral of a teenage suicide, questioning if *there was something she could have done*.

Onishi's interest in this story is in survivors' guilt – the family left behind struggling to cope with the fact that someone felt so marginalised and hopeless in their midst that they chose to end it all. Daughter Shiori is already worried for her mother's mental health, and wonders if she should postpone applying to university. The family is left trying to square their memories of happier times with their experience of finding the eldest son bleeding in the bathroom.

Onishi's story is told in a matter-of-fact way, relentlessly mundane in its depiction of the everyday world that bumbles along regardless, oblivious to the lead characters' pain. In doing so, it taps into troubling real-world statistics that revealed that suicide was the major cause of death in Japanese teenagers in 2014. This already came seven years after the government issued a white paper on suicide prevention strategies, hoping to reduce suicides by 20% within a decade.

And, to be fair, the suicide rate in Japan is slowly declining, although it is still the highest of any developed country, claiming 70 victims a day. Some sociologists have suggested that this is symptomatic of a country in which the individual is valued less than their place within society overall, but that alone

is not enough. Others point to Japan's long tradition of suicide as a morally acceptable, noble way out of impossible circumstances, and that in such a context, Japanese coroners may be more willing to return a suicide verdict than, say, coroners in Catholic countries.

Major causes of Japanese suicide include bullying and financial stress, with the latter responsible for 25% of all deaths, largely because of the strong-arm tactics used by loan sharks. Among the elderly, suicide has often been attributed to post-retirement depression, leading to many programmes designed to keep pensioners busy. In that regard, *Us at Fifty* may even be part of the phenomenon: informational outreach aimed at an at-risk population group.

**"MAJOR CAUSES OF JAPANESE SUICIDE INCLUDE BULLYING AND FINANCIAL STRESS, WITH THE LATTER RESPONSIBLE FOR 25% OF ALL DEATHS, LARGELY BECAUSE OF THE STRONG-ARM TACTICS USED BY LOAN SHARKS."**





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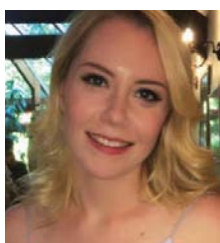




# NEO ARTIST SHOWCASE

# THE BEST IN READER TALENT

EVERY ISSUE, NEO WILL BE FEATURING OUR FAVOURITE WORK  
FROM ARTISTS INSPIRED BY ANIME, MANGA AND GAMES



**NAME** CHRISSY MOON

**AGE** 23

**BASED IN** LINCOLNSHIRE

**PROFESSION** FREELANCE ILLUSTRATOR

**FAVOURITE SHOW** I HAVE SEEN NEARLY EVERY DOCUMENTARY THAT'S FEATURED ON NETFLIX!

## BIOGRAPHY

I have been interested in illustration for most of my 'school life' – I left Art and Design College at the age of 18, and have since studied Illustration at the University of Lincoln, where all my hard work and 'all- nighters' paid off when I achieved a first class honours degree!

I live in Lincolnshire in the countryside, where there's not much to do, so I often carry a sketchbook around with me if I am visiting anywhere new, so that I can doodle down anything that inspires me throughout the day.

At University, I wrote my end of year dissertation on Disney movies before the year 2000, and movies such as *Alice in Wonderland* greatly inspire the type of characters I create. The intricate yet simple details and the colours with which Disney characters were painted and drawn is one of my biggest inspirations.

My illustrations are all focused upon 'cute' characters, and over the last few years my style has progressively changed as I develop my skills in drawing and painting, particularly my skill with watercolours. Watercolours (specifically Winsor & Newton) are my go-to medium. I love the texture, colour, transparency and ease of how the paint appears, however my pictures often stand out because of the bold ink I use; the black ink outline bringing the colour to life. The line work in my illustrations has become more simplistic as my style has progressed and I have become more confident with developing my characters.

I was previously featured in NEO magazine in 2014, and since then I have come a long way. Going forward, I wish to pursue a career in illustration and I am striving for this by working towards launching a new business called 'Mini Moon UK' in the near future. See my work online at [deviantart.com/chriissymoon](http://deviantart.com/chriissymoon).



## INSPIRATION

My inspirations come from popular culture and anything humorous that has a 'play on words' theme. I like animals, I am definitely a cat person and I like to add them into many doodles that I do. I am also inspired by anything particularly girly, such as flowers, the colour pink, and I love the countryside too!



**1. Summer Cola.** She's fashionable, bold and striking. I wanted to portray a character who stands out from the rest. You can see her personality just by looking at her. **2. An Autumnal Friend.** My favourite season, this illustration is a cute and cosy take on autumnal fashion. **3. Bumble Baes.** A simple and fun 'play on words' doodle painted using watercolours.



## NEO WANTS YOU

If you are interested in submitting work to be featured in the NEO ARTIST SHOWCASE, please email [mail@neomag.co.uk](mailto:mail@neomag.co.uk) with 'ARTIST SHOWCASE' as your subject header, along with an internet link with examples of your work.





*I'm full of  
bad ideas*



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TECH CONFUSES ME**



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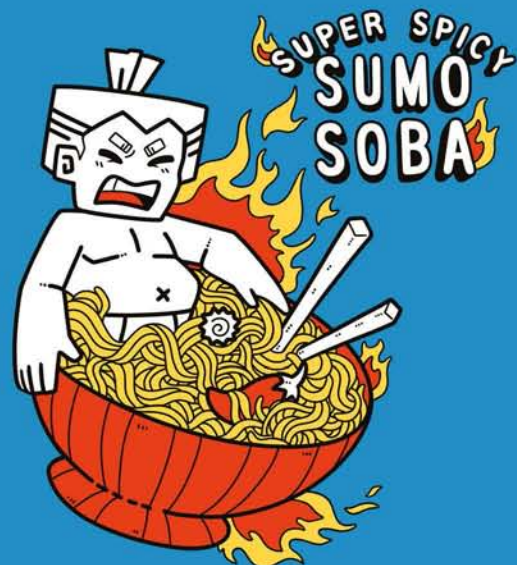
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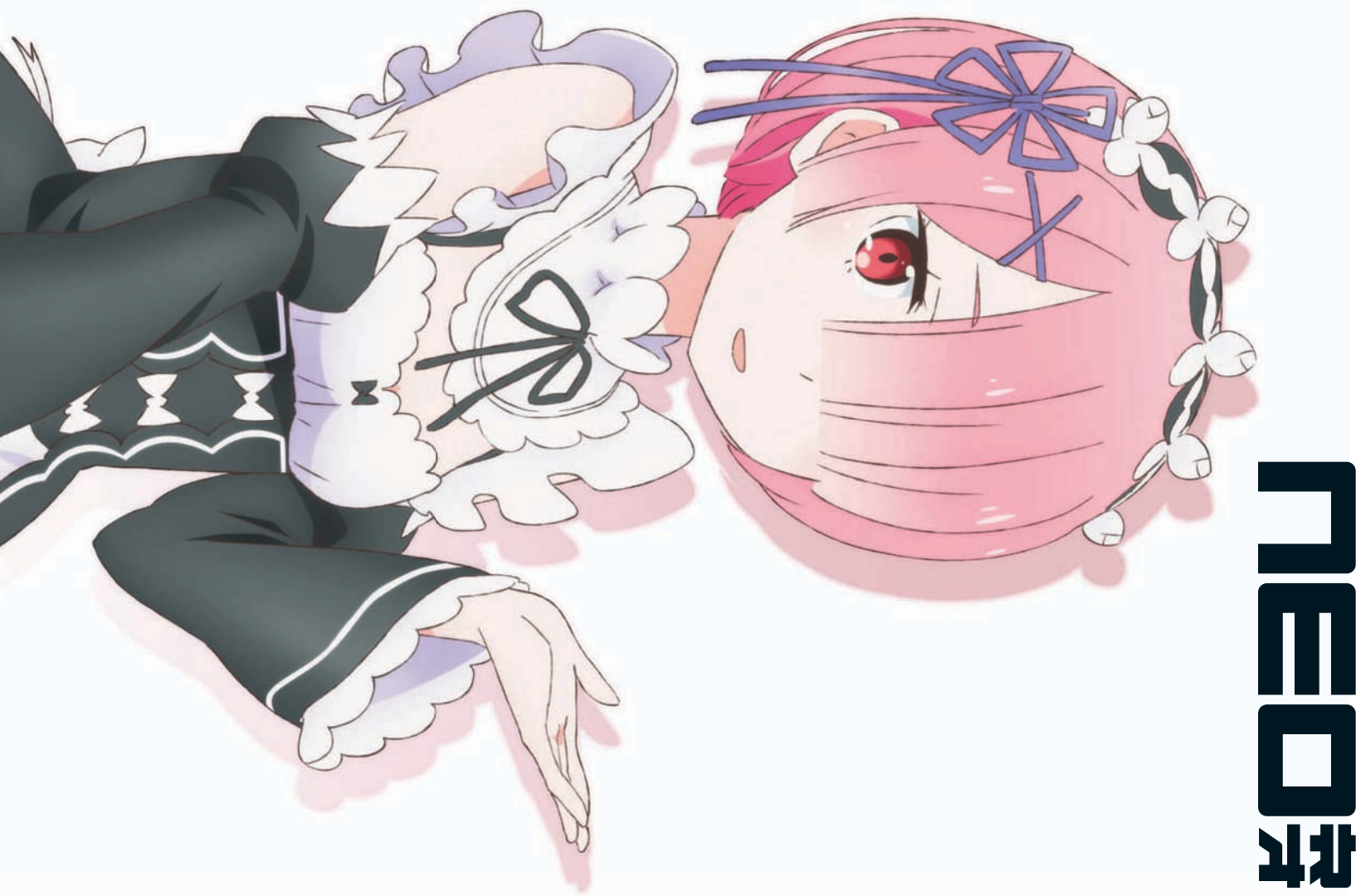
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# COSPLAY CORNER

NEO READERS STRUTTING  
THEIR STUFF!

[RIGHT] The glorious Black Cat, by Jen Tate Cosplay.  
Photo by Wallis Photographic at KIS Studio.

[BELOW] Izupie (@izu.cos.pie on Twitter) as Kairi from  
*Kingdom Hearts 2*.

[BOTTOM RIGHT] Mary Jane, by Jen Tate Cosplay. Photo  
by Wallis Photographic at KIS Studio.







[TOP LEFT] Mikan Tsumiki (Despair Version) from *Danganrompa 2 Goodbye Despair*. Cosplayer: asecrettree (instagram). Photography: chloe\_westwell (instagram).

[TOP RIGHT AND ABOVE] Lilezza Cosplay (instagram.com/lilezza ) as Ruby Rose from *RWBY*. Photo by Donald Manning.

[LEFT] Jen Tate Cosplay as Spider Gwen. Photo by Wallis Photographic at KIS Studio.





## [FILM REVIEW]

# THE VENGEFUL BEAUTY

Pregnant, deadly, and mad as hell!

OUT NOW // 88 FILMS // 15 // MARTIAL ARTS // £15.99 (BLU-RAY)  
// 82 MINS

**PLOT** During the Qing Dynasty, the Emperor uses his squad of assassins, the Flying Guillotines, to eliminate all dissent. After her husband is killed by the Guillotines, Rong Qiuyan (Chen Ping) swears revenge on their leader Jin Gangfeng (Lo Lih) – but it's not easy fighting for your life when you're pregnant!

**T**he *Vengeful Beauty* was the third kung fu decapitation movie from director Ho Meng-Hua, following in the bloody footsteps of 1975's *The Flying Guillotine*, to which this is practically a sequel, and 1976's *The Dragon Missile*, with which this film shares actor Lo Lih as the main villain.

In the lead role, Chen Ping is not as well known as a martial arts heroine as her contemporaries Angela Mao or Kara Wai, likely because a good part of her career was spent starring in erotic dramas rather than kicking butts. Qiuyan is certainly a colourful protagonist, assuming the identity of The Bloody Hibiscus when she ventures out into the night to fight the Emperor's assassins.

The action here is choreographed by Shaw Brothers' veteran Tong Kai, another connection to *The Dragon Missile*, and he offers a creative blend of wirework and swordplay with his Peking Opera-informed style.

Chen Ping is usually doubled for the more acrobatic parts of her fight scenes, but she strikes a good pose. Some of the footage of the Guillotines in action looks like it has been recycled from their debut outing, presumably to save money on special effects, and there's noticeably a greater emphasis this time on swordplay than decapitations.

Qiuyan is joined on her mission of vengeance by Ma Sen (Norman Tsui) and Wang Jun (Yueh Hua), which sets up a little romantic triangle as the two men compete for her affections – even though she's only just been widowed (and is also with child!). Tsui was commonly cast in villainous roles, so it's interesting to see him playing a hero for a change.

The story is very much a family affair – not only is the pregnant Qiuyan out to avenge her hubby, the evil Jin dispatches his three lethal offspring to take her out. The last of these is Shaozhi, played by Siu Yam-Yam, who has the dubious honour of participating in a fight scene while topless, a move clearly intended to appeal to male viewers. The screenplay, by the ridiculously prolific On Szeto, throws in plenty of twists, some of which are more plausible than others, but it keeps the pace lively and there's never a dull moment.

It's easy to see the influence of Japanese chanbara cinema, particularly the *Lone Wolf And Cub* series and *Lady Snowblood*, on *The Vengeful Beauty* with its spurts of blood and topless swordswomen. Yet while it's certainly exploitative, it's always entertaining. ●

★★★★☆

## KEY TALENT

On Szeto was one of Hong Kong's most prolific screenwriters. Amongst hundreds of screenplays, he wrote the early Hong Kong gangster film *The Teahouse*, and scripted Sammo Hung's *Warriors Two*.





## [FILM REVIEW]

# JOJO'S BIZARRE ADVENTURE: DIAMOND IS UNBREAKABLE

## MIIKE

Miike is hardly a newcomer to manga adaptations. Check out the brawling delinquents of *Crows Zero*, the colourful escapades of *Yatterman*, or the exhausting slaughter of *Blade Of The Immortal*.

27 AUGUST // MANGA ENTERTAINMENT // 18 // FANTASY // £12.99 (DVD) // 119 MINS

**PLOT** There's a serial killer on the loose in the small town of Morioh and a man shooting people with an arrow that unlocks superpowers within those it strikes. After the killer targets his grandfather, Josuke (Kento Yamazaki), a teen with strange powers of his own, vows to catch the murderer.

Takashi Miike's adaptation of *Jojo's Bizarre Adventure* starts at the beginning of season three of the anime and faithfully retells the events of the first five episodes. On the one hand, this means that Miike doesn't botch the whole premise of the

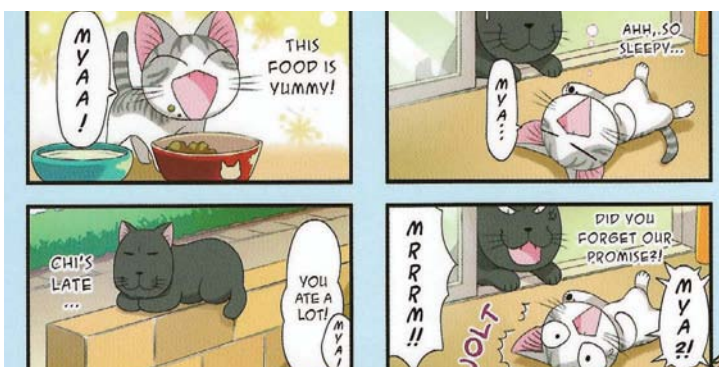
series like the *Attack On Titan* movies, but on the other, the film is clearly targeted at established fans so what's the point of telling them a story they already know? There are precious few concessions to newcomers, who are likely to be baffled despite a series of clumsy expo dumps, mostly from Jotaro (Yusuke Iseya) who disappears entirely in the second half. The pacing of a TV series doesn't lend itself well to a feature film and the screenplay struggles to build any tension while failing to bless the characters with any depth or charisma. The climactic battle comes too early and is let down by dreadful pacing, an overreliance on CGI, and the villain's silly superpowers.

**With Takashi Miike at the helm, *Diamond Is Unbreakable* is predictably bloody and violent, but it's a joyless experience. ●**

☆☆☆☆

WORDS BY DAVID WEST

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## CHI'S SWEET ADVENTURES

OUT NOW // DISTRIBUTOR VERTICAL // CATS // £9.99 // CREATED BY KONAMI KANATA // ADAPTED BY KINOKO NATSUME

If you loved *Chi's Sweet Home*, you'll love *Chi's Sweet Adventures* – a brand new collection of adorable tales about the titular kitten, who is always getting into mischief. This is a slim volume, which makes it a fairly pricey purchase by the page, but it is printed in full colour, which of course adds value, especially if like us you're a fan of the cute art style!

The action here is fairly simplistic which makes it a great gift for younger children, and the 4-panel comedic format means every page is chock full of absorbing little treats. It might not be big, and it might not be clever, but it is darn cute.

**You can't beat *Chi's Sweet Adventure* for a hefty dose of kawaii! ●**

☆☆☆☆



## STREET MOBSTER

OUT NOW // ARROW VIDEO // 18 // ACTION // £24.99 (BLU-RAY) // 92 MINS

Fresh out of prison, Okita (Bunta Sugawara) refuses to join either of the big crime syndicates that govern Tokyo's underworld, fighting to be master of his own fate. Released in 1972, Kinji Fukasaku's gangland thriller feels like a practice run for his *Battles Without Honour And Humanity* series which reunited the director with Sugawara the following year. It has all the hallmarks of Fukasaku's gangster films, with chaotic action scenes, sex and violence (often at the same time), handheld camerawork and lighting that shrouds the cast in shadows. Mayumi Nagisa provides strong support as Kimiyo, the prostitute who loves Okita despite his abusive behaviour.

***Street Mobster's* sheer breathless energy and Sugawara's volcanic performance make for an intense and bruising experience. ●**

☆☆☆☆





# LETHAL LADIES UNITE!

Fourteen fighting females from across SNK's illustrious history of video game pugilism are summoned to a mysterious mansion to do battle! NEO's David West talks to producer Yasuyuki Oda about the reversal of SNK's fortunes and putting a new twist on the fighting game format in *SNK Heroines Tag Team Frenzy*!

When *King Of Fighters XIV* arrived in 2016, there was more riding on the game's success than fans may have realised. SNK had been absent from game development for several years – *KoF XIII* was released in 2010, leaving a six-year gap between titles, but *KoF XIV* proved that the company so inextricably linked to classic fighting titles like *Samurai Shodown* and *Fatal Fury* could still deliver the goods.

"There were even points when I thought, 'Are we really going to be able to do this?'" confesses producer Yasuyuki Oda, but in the end he says, "We made the game we wanted to make and we made what the fans were expecting, so there was a meeting of the developers' intent and the fans' desires."

## THROWING A CURVEBALL

In the wake of *KoF XIV*, fans waited for SNK to announce the 15th instalment of their flagship title. But that's not what happened. "We wanted to throw everybody a curveball," says Oda, and instead of *KoF XV*, the company unveiled *SNK Heroines Tag Team Frenzy*, which brings together 14 heroines from across the company's history.

There are old favourites like Leona Heidern and Mai Shiranui alongside a host of newer faces from *KoF XIV*, all poised to duke it out inside a mysterious mansion. "We chose the characters based on three parameters," says Oda. "One was popular characters, ones that we knew the fans would want to see. Second was characters who are newer but who we wanted to make more popular going forwards, and third was what I call characters in the 'Special' box. Basically, that's Shermie."

Each of the 14 playable characters has three different costumes of varying

degrees of skiminess, plus a host of customisable options that can be purchased using the in-game currency, all of which meant plenty of work for designer Eisuke Ogura.

"He was given quite a lot of latitude to create the costumes," says Oda. "After he had come up with several different iterations and drawings we would go through them and ask him either to finetune things or reset. Artists have a habit of bringing really weird things to the table and so we just say, 'Yeah, we're not using that.'"

The action sees players select two characters, one in the role of Attacker and the other as Supporter, facing another pair of lethal ladies. "From the very beginning we'd wanted to do a new take on the fighting game genre," says Oda. "We thought, 'How can we make this a little more interesting and not have it be the way it's always been?'"

Their solution was to have one shared health bar between the two characters, as opposed to the standard format for two-versus-two games where you have to knock each character's health down to zero one after the other.

## IN CONTROL

Another shift in direction for fighting games in *SNK Heroines Tag Team Frenzy* was the choice to avoid long, complicated inputs to pull off the coolest moves. "We definitely made a conscious effort to make the game more approachable from a battle command perspective," says Oda, who wanted players to be able to use a standard controller for the game.

"Generally, people use a fighting stick when they play fighting games and the commands are really, really elaborate, but because we wanted this



## The Art Of Fighting Without Fighting

"Originally, if you look at *Street Fighter* and things like that it was based on real fighting," says Oda about martial arts in video games. "However, if you had continued in that style, everything would have ended up looking the same, so gradually the moves have become much more fantasy-based."



"ARTISTS HAVE A HABIT OF BRINGING REALLY WEIRD THINGS TO THE TABLE AND SO WE JUST SAY, 'YEAH, WE'RE NOT USING THAT.'" YASUYUKI ODA ON WORKING WITH EISUKE OGURA.



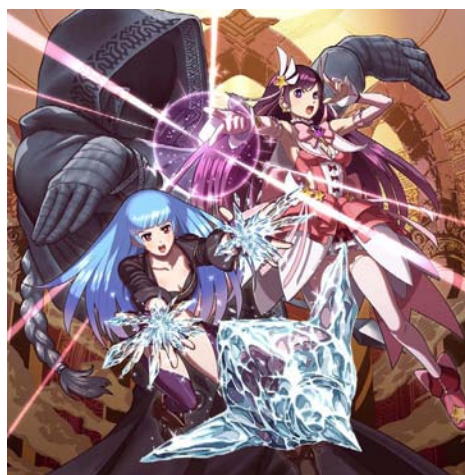
to be more approachable and we wanted people to play on controllers, we made it a lot easier. The combos and special moves are much easier to pull off on a controller, so what it comes down to is not how well a player is able to memorise and input complex commands, but just learning about timing and things like that."

It's all part of a strategy to insure *SNK Heroines* can cross over from hardcore fighting game fans to casual players. The aforementioned in-game currency opens up the possibility to enhance the fighters' appearance and users can gamble currency against other players in a Betting Match.

"The main thing to note is that all of the purchasable items have no effect on the gameplay at all. They're all cosmetic," says Oda. "There are lots of different backgrounds and lots of things you can put on the girls, they are there just to make it fun. You can take pictures and upload them to social media, things like that. One small example is that at the beginning of the game, the voiceover is a man's voice, but you can purchase things where it turns into the voice actresses who play the characters instead."

## THE SOUND OF BATTLE

With a large chunk of the roster returning from *KoF XIV*, the team brought back the same voice actresses for *SNK Heroines*, including franchise



## Arcade Action

In addition to the PS4 and Switch releases, *SNK Heroines* is heading for Japanese arcades. "The more people you have playing your game the better," says Oda. "Arcade games attract a very special kind of gamer and the difficulty has to be really high to give them what they want."

veterans like Ami Koshizumi as Mai Shiramui, Yumi Kakazu as Kula Diamond, and Haruna Ikezawa as Athena Asamiya. The characters' dialogue varies depending on who they are paired with in their tag team, which means that changing your team will change your playing experience. "It's a really important element to get people to play the game multiple times," says Oda. "What we want is for the player to play with every different combination of characters, so that's over 90 different paths to hear and see everything. We thought really hard about how to entice people to do that because as developers we want people to get the most out of the game, so that's why we thought about all the different interactions and dialogue for the characters."

One of the toughest parts of the process for the actresses is recording all the shouts, cries and grunts necessary to bring the combat to life. "There is a lot of talent out there who are really good at reading normal lines, but when it comes to making those effort noises, they're really bad at it," says Oda. "One thing to note is that we always take the attack noises when the characters get punched at the end because that really messes up their throats." Well, that's thoughtful.

Jump into the melee when *SNK Heroines Tag Team Frenzy* arrives on the PS4 and Nintendo Switch on 7 September from NIS America.





[ANIME REVIEW]

# BAKUON!! COMPLETE COLLECTION

Get your motor running

27 AUGUST // MVM // 15 // SLICE OF LIFE // £29.99 (DVD), £34.99 (BLU-RAY) // 300 MINS // 12 EPISODES

**PLOT** Tired of riding her bicycle up the hill to school, Hane Sakura is inspired when she sees Onsa Amane arrive in style on her motorcycle. Swept up by Onsa's enthusiasm, Hane joins the school motorbike club, starts studying to get her licence, and discovers the thrill of the open road.

**M**oe girls and motorcycles. That's *Bakuon!!* in a nutshell. The series follows the blueprint of high school slice of life shows like *K-On!* (what's with the exclamation points?) almost to the letter. The star of the story is the girl who, prior to the start of the tale, has no interest in or knowledge of the central topic at hand. But then she discovers a hitherto latent passion for the particular subject du jour – making music, riding motorcycles, even sports, whatever the case may be – and throws herself into it with gusto.

The rest of the cast ticks off a lot of the requisite boxes. There's Rin, a hot-tempered, highly competitive busty blonde; Onsa, who's a little bit of a tomboy; rich girl Hijiri for whom motorcycles represent wild, youthful rebellion despite the fact she rides in a sidecar while her butler does all the actual motorcycling; and Raimu, the mysterious odd one who never

takes off her helmet or speaks aloud. Later in the series, just as was the case in *K-On!*, the script introduces a new, highly talented younger girl to keep things fresh. That's Chisame, a champion racer struggling to adapt to riding as a civilian.

Refreshingly, the series is generally light on fanservice. True, the camera loves to look at Rin's generous bust, but there is no parade of panty shots, which is either a boon or a bane depending on your particular proclivities. No one's judging you (yes, we all are).

There's not much plot to speak of. Rather, the series uses a slice of life format, following the girls through the school years, hanging out, riding their bikes and having fun. Many standard high school plot beats are present and correct – there's a school festival and a trip to a hot springs resort (which is the most fanservice-intensive instalment) – but not much substance to the storytelling.

Dramatic conflict is limited to debates about the merits of Suzuki motorcycles, or worries about someone passing the licence test, and even the occasional scenes of someone crashing their bike, which are played for laughs. Production values are high, with enormous attention to detail devoted to the bikes and some lovely riding sequences, particularly at night.

**Positives** – lovely animation, likeable characters, light and fluffy tone. **Negatives** – scant interest in drama or compelling narratives. The bikes are rendered with such love, this could have been commissioned by the Motorcycle Industry Of Japan (we just made that up). ●

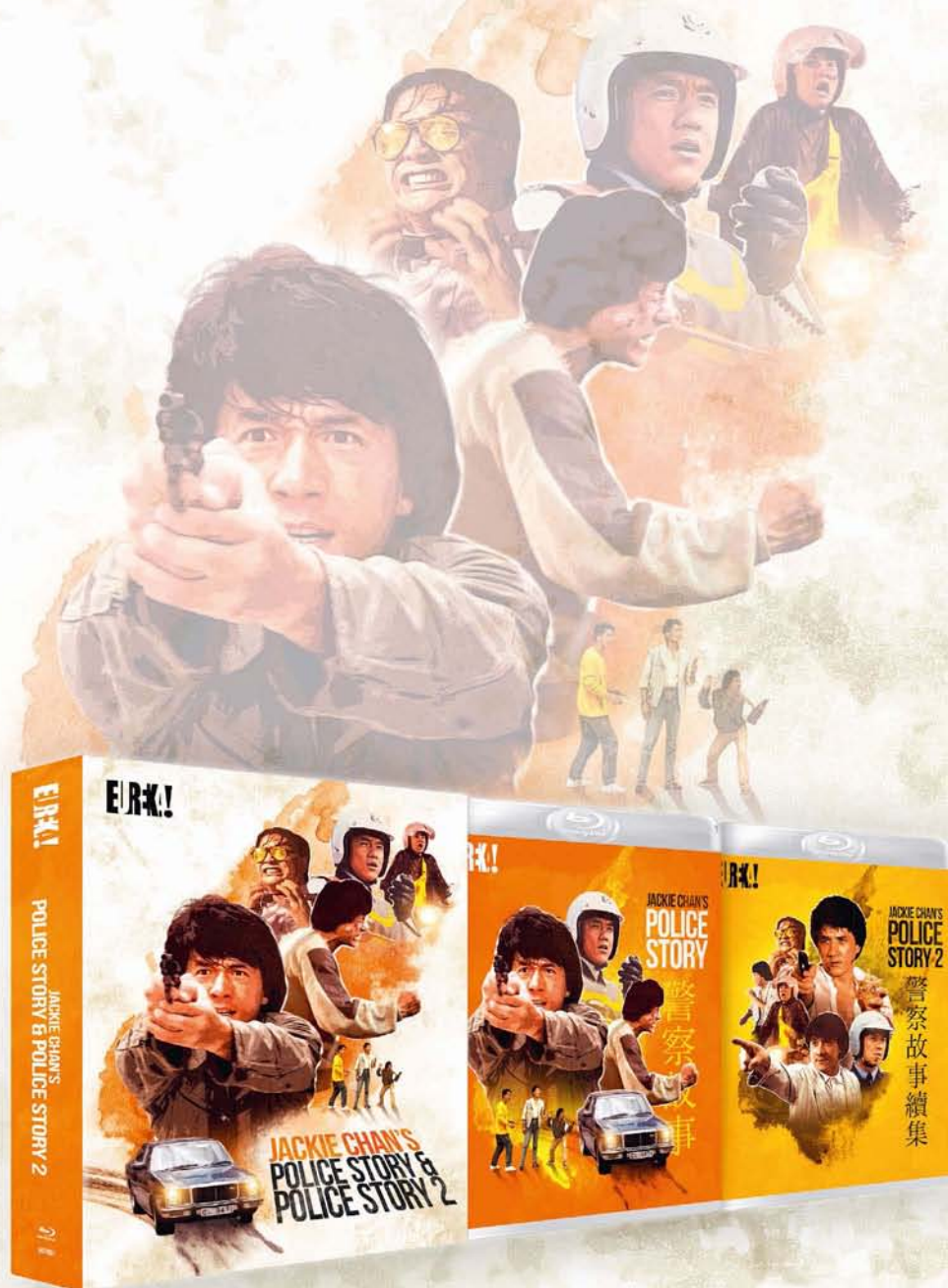
★★★★★

## IF YOU LIKE THIS

Need more moe? Then you need to see *The Melancholy Of Haruhi Suzumiya* and *K-On!*, or if you're a speed freak, check out *Initial D*.



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# NEO'S FAVOURITE FIVE FILMS BY SHINOBU HASHIMOTO

A quintet of classics from the recently departed screenwriter

WORDS BY DAVID WEST

## Rashomon

Shinobu Hashimoto, who passed away in July at the age of 100, got his first break in the Japanese movie business with a script adapted from a story called *In a Grove*, but better known as *Rashomon* when it was filmed by Akira Kurosawa. It was the story of a murderous encounter between a young rich couple and Tajomaru, a bandit played by Toshiro Mifune, told from four different perspectives. In 1951, *Rashomon* became the first Japanese film to win the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival, introducing Japanese cinema to the world. Hashimoto worked with Kurosawa until 1960's *The Bad Sleep Well*, writing screenplays including *Ikiru* and *Throne Of Blood* in a trio composed of Hashimoto, Kurosawa and Hideo Oguni.



## Seven Samurai

Perhaps the greatest achievement in Kurosawa's career as a filmmaker, *Seven Samurai* was another product of the Kurosawa, Hashimoto, Oguni writing partnership. Takashi Shimura stars as the ronin hired by farmers to protect their village from a bandit raid, but it's Toshiro Mifune who steals the show. The film went so far over budget and behind schedule that Toho studios almost replaced Kurosawa. While *Seven Samurai* became the most expensive film Toho had made up to that point, it was a huge commercial and critical success. An extraordinary blend of high adventure, drama and humanist philosophy, it has inspired remakes, but none have surpassed the original.



## Harakiri

Hashimoto produced another humanist masterpiece when he adapted Yasuhiko Takiguchi's novel for director Masaki Kobayashi. Tatsuya Nakadai stars as Hanshiro, a destitute ronin who shows up at the gates of the Iyi Clan requesting permission to use their grounds for harakiri. Hashimoto's screenplay is brilliantly constructed, teasing out Hanshiro's true motivations and his connection to the last ronin who made such a request. The sword fights are superbly staged and the cinematography is stunning, but what really stands out is the sheer anger underpinning the movie, which is a scathing attack on the nihilism of the bushido code and the sheer callousness of those in power who will do anything to protect their status.



## The Sword Of Doom

Although Akira Kurosawa and Masaki Kobayashi are better known in the west, Kihachi Okamoto was one of the masters of the chanbara genre. Hashimoto wrote two screenplays for Okamoto, *Samurai Assassin* and *The Sword Of Doom*. The latter is the story of Ryunosuke (Tatsuya Nakadai), an incredibly skilled but sadistic swordsman who leaves a trail of corpses behind him everywhere he goes. Hired as an assassin for the Shinsengumi, his past constantly threatens to catch up to him while internal power struggles within the Shinsengumi erupt into bloodshed. *The Sword Of Doom* is one of the darkest chanbara films ever made, a powerful study of evil, and Hashimoto's script savagely condemns the false rewards of a life dedicated only to violence.

## Samurai Rebellion

Hashimoto reunited with Masaki Kobayashi on *Samurai Rebellion* for another brutal dissection of the bushido code and authoritarianism. When his daughter-in-law is ordered to leave her husband and return to her old role as mistress to Lord Matsudaira, Isaburo Sasahara (Toshiro Mifune) refuses to break up his son's marriage. Facing the wrath of his entire clan, Sasahara's small act of rebellion escalates into violence, pitting him against his old friend Asano (Tatsuya Nakadai). As they did with *Harakiri*, Kobayashi and Hashimoto use the trappings of a chanbara film to create an intensely moving story about one man's refusal to flinch in the face of oppression. Mifune's performance is amongst his finest.





# Inverities

## BATTLE AGAINST DAMNATION

The ferocious new EP from Japan's power metal heroines

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## [ANIME REVIEW]

# DIGIMON TAMERS

Far From Tame

17 SEPTEMBER // MANGA // PG // ACTION, COMEDY, SCI-FI // £39.99 (DVD) // 1275 MINS // 51 EPISODES

**PLOT** *Digimon Tamers* is a darker take on the children's TV series, and one where *Digimon* exists as a card game. When student Takato Matsuki draws his own Digimon, Guilmon, he soon comes face to face with his own creation and what it means to be a Tamer.

*Digimon Adventure* has always had mature storylines and moments, but *Tamers* truly kicks it up a notch with something far scarier than digital monsters – humans. The main antagonist, the computer program D-Reaper, was created by the United States Department of Defence and its sole purpose

is to destroy the digital world once its number of inhabitants reaches a certain limit. It's quite Lovecraftian, which says much about how it could frighten a child!

*Tamers* features a standalone story, and characters which do not require fans to be too familiar with the first two seasons of *Adventure*, but it's still a Toei Animation work and *Tamers* remains true to the series' roots in bringing a chosen group of children to protect the Digital World. It's a unique take on the series, but one that excels thanks to its confidence and great handling of tricky subject matters.

*Digimon Tamers* succeeds in telling a darker tale that's balanced out by entertaining dialogue and action, although some scenes are shockingly morbid. It's one of the strongest entries in the *Digimon* TV series, and it's fantastic that it's finally releasing on DVD in the west. ●

★★★★★

WORDS BY MICHAEL DODSON

## NO WONDER IT'S SCARY

*Digimon Tamers* is penned by writer Chiaki J. Kokana, whose other works include *Serial Experiments Lain* and *The Big O*.



## [GAME REVIEW]

# WARIOWARE GOLD

Microgame Mania!

OUT NOW // 7 // ACTION, PARTY // £34.99 // 3DS // PUBLISHER NINTENDO // DEVELOPER INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS / NINTENDO EPD

**PLOT** In order to refill his coffers, a penniless Wario hosts a video games tournament featuring over 300 microgames from across the entire *WarioWare* franchise, challenging players to mash, twist and touch their way to victory!

Most microgames in *WarioWare* last no more than five seconds and encompass a wide variety of scenarios and graphical styles. Press A to send a finger into a nostril, rotate the 3DS to steer a plane through a narrow gap, trace a path for Link's boomerang in a bitesize recreation of a classic *Zelda* title... the beauty of *WarioWare* is that you never know what's going to be thrown at

you next, but with only seconds to react and the games' speed and difficulty ever increasing, you've got to be on your toes!

The challenge modes add a welcome variety of gameplay styles outside the main story (which can be beaten within just a few hours), and spending coins on a capsule machine will nab you a selection of unlockable gadgets and gizmos – though most of them offer no more than a few seconds of amusement. In a quite fitting release as the 3DS enters its golden years, *WarioWare Gold* may well be a quickly put together 'best of' title to fill a rapidly thinning release schedule, but its quickfire play style and surrealist humour make it a perfect pick up and play game for the summer months.

A nostalgic hit for those of us familiar with the series, and a highly recommended compilation for new gamers. ●

★★★★★

## VOICE ACTING

In a first for the series, all of *WarioWare's* cut scenes are fully voiced. Don't like the voiceovers? Record your own through the 3DS' microphone for amusing results!





# Fate/ocrypha

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MAAYA SAKAMOTO .....(AS RULER)

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MIYUKI SAWASHIRO (AS SABER OF RED)

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FOR LUCKY READERS this issue, we have an amazing prize to give away from SEGA: launch editions of *Shining Resonance Refrain* for the PS4, Xbox One, and Switch. All you have to do is let us know which console you've got and if you win, you'll be the proud owner of a Draconic Launch Edition of the game featuring a collectible metal slip case. Gorgeous!

The game follows the story of Yuma Ilvern, a naive young boy who finds himself harbouring the might of the legendary Shining Dragon – a powerful soul being sought by the Beowolf. These warriors are the arm of the Empire of Lombardia, an invasion force set to take over the Kingdom of Astoria. Yuma's life will never be the same again as he fights for his life and learns how to unleash his new powers!

If want to win a copy of the launch edition of *Shining Resonance Refrain*, all you have to do is answer the following question correctly, and let us know which console you own, to be entered into our prize draw.

**WHO IS THE PROTAGONIST OF SHINING RESONANCE REFRAIN?**

- A) YUMA ILVERN
- B) TONY TAKA
- C) MAKOTO SUZUKI

You can enter by emailing your answer along with your name and address to [neomagcomp@gmail.com](mailto:neomagcomp@gmail.com), with the subject header NEO 179 Shining Resonance Refrain competition. Alternatively, you can enter by sending the correct answer on the back of a postcard, along with your address, to the Uncooked Media editorial address printed on page 084. Closing date: 20 September



## TERMS AND CONDITIONS

No correspondence will be entered into. No employees of Uncooked Media or the companies providing the prizes may enter. No cash alternative is offered to these prizes. Entries are only valid if they reach us by the closure date. Multiple entries will be disregarded. The publisher's decision is final. Good luck!



# DRONE

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[ANIME REVIEW]

# TWIN STAR EXORCISTS PART ONE

## Double Trouble

27 AUGUST // ANIME LIMITED // TBC // ACTION, ROMANCE // £49.99  
(BLU-RAY / DVD COLLECTOR'S BOX) // 325 MINS // 13 EPISODES

**PLOT** Japan's two most powerful young exorcists have a unique destiny – to give birth to the child that will cleanse every evil spirit throughout the world. Just one thing is getting their way: they can't stand each other! Rokuro and Benio can easily take down malevolent phantasms, but becoming a team might be more than they can handle...

**T**win Star Exorcists is, from the outset, very clearly a shonen series in the *Jump* style. In fact, being based on an original manga published in *Jump Square*, the magazine that's currently probably best known for the similarly-titled *Blue Exorcist*, viewers might begin the series feeling like it all seems somewhat familiar... However, while *Twin Star Exorcists* certainly adopts a fairly well-worn set of thematic hooks to get new viewers in the door, it keeps them there with its own unique style and an abundance of flair.

As mentioned, the series follows protagonists Rokuro and Benio, as they navigate the trials and pitfalls of adolescence, dealing with their shared destinies, and trying not to get eaten by evil ghosts. As a (prophesied) couple, the pair couldn't be more different – Rokuro is your typical shonen hero; likeable, but brash, loud, and interested in anything more than his magical destiny. Benio, however,

has dedicated her life to her calling, and that (plus a hefty helping of mysterious tragic backstory) has made her somewhat aloof and distant around other people. As with the show's initial premise, the pair's odd-couple personality types should be fairly hackneyed, but each of the series' protagonists has enough character – especially with their energetic and charming character designs – to breathe new life into an old formula, and it's generally pretty fun to watch the two spark off each other.

Of course, you can't have a shonen series without a hefty helping of action – preferably of the explosive magical variety. In *Twin Star Exorcists* this generally takes the form of the main characters taking down the giant spirits known as Kegare (when they're not fighting each other that is!). It has to be said, while the character interactions are fun, it's in this area that the show truly shines. Pierrot, the studio behind the animated adaptation, have brought countless action-oriented series to life over almost four decades, and it shows – the action scenes are phenomenally fluid and exciting to watch, and the entire series has a bold and colourful aesthetic that makes even the scenes that don't revolve around slaying evil spirits a joy to watch.

*Twin Star Exorcists* may not win any prizes for originality, but what it lacks in freshness, it makes up for with great art, fun storytelling, and balls-to-the-wall action. If the old shonen staples have lost some of their allure, you might have a lot of fun with this series instead. ●

★★★★☆

## COLLECTOR'S

The current release might only have the series' first dozen or so episodes, but the collector's edition comes with a fancy box with room to house the discs for all the future releases as well!





[ANIME REVIEW]

## GRIMOIRE OF ZERO

Beauty and the Beastman

### LET THEM FIGHT!

Zero is a playable character in the *Dengeki Bunko: Fighting Climax Ignition* fighting game, pitting her against another overpowered magic user from the light novel publisher – *The Irregular at Magic High School's* Tatsuya Shiba.

10 SEPTEMBER // MVM ENTERTAINMENT // TBC // FANTASY // £29.99 (DVD), £34.99 (BLU-RAY) // 300 MINS // 12 EPISODES

**PLOT** In a world where witches run rampant, a half-man half-beast mercenary encounters a child-like witch named Zero. She agrees to turn him into a human in exchange for protecting her during her search for a magical tome which could prove catastrophic in the wrong hands.

It might be a world of fantasy, but it's one where witches are burned at the stake, which immediately makes it feel like one with familiar historical overtones. Humans, Beastfallen (human / animal hybrids) and witches all live in fear of one another, a setup which makes the relationship between Zero and Mercenary shine all the brighter. Their dynamic is the

absolute heart of the show, swaying effortlessly between charming banter and genuine emotion.

On the surface, *Grimoire of Zero* might just look and feel like another run of the mill medieval magic show, yet in addition to the strong character relationships it develops, the story capitalises on the seeds of mistrust it has sown to provide plenty of twists and turns along the way. Though the lowkey character moments often prove more memorable than the narrative itself, there's enough here to keep viewers entertained, as well on their toes about who's behind all of these magical machinations!

Though these 12 episodes are clearly just the first arc in a much bigger story, *Grimoire of Zero* is a satisfyingly self-contained fantasy adventure that lures you in with the charming relationship of its lead characters. ●

★★★★★

WORDS BY MITCHELL LINEHAM

WORDS BY MITCHELL LINEHAM



## CAPTAIN TOAD: TREASURE TRACKER

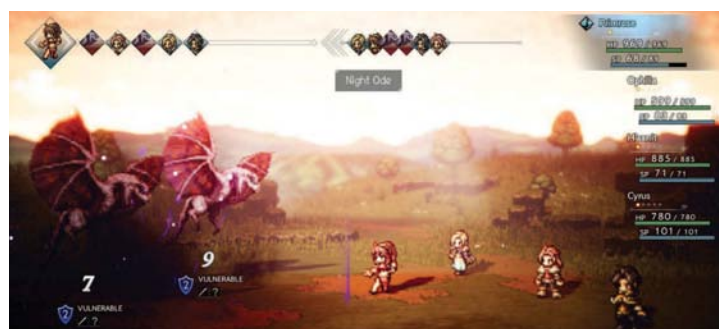
OUT NOW // NINTENDO // PUZZLE // £34.99 (NINTENDO SWITCH), £34.99 (NINTENDO 3DS) // CERT 3

*Captain Toad: Treasure Tracker* follows Toad and Toadette on their journey to collect Power Stars. In doing so, Toadette is captured by bird villain Wingo! Toad must save his princess, and he knows just the way thanks to Mario! The game starts off easy, but it doesn't take too long to find yourself twisting and turning the 3D stages for a solution. There's plenty of content here, and it becomes increasingly hard to put down the further you progress.

This one is better played via the Switch's handheld function due to its reliance on touch controls to solve some puzzles, and doing trial and error to see what works. *Captain Toad's* visuals really shine on Switch, and it's a beautiful game with outstanding stage design.

*Captain Toad* is enjoyable and mind-bending, and Toad and Toadette are so adorable! It's great to see this game get another lease of life. ●

★★★★★



## OCTOPATH TRAVELER

OUT NOW // NINTENDO // JRPG // £49.99 (NINTENDO SWITCH) // CERT 12

*Octopath Traveler* follows the tales of eight separate adventurers as they each tackle their own journey in a fantasy world, taking players back to the JRPGs of old – but with a modern twist.

Despite being seemingly standalone, everything comes together in the true ending. This requires you to thoroughly explore the world and to ensure you've seen all it has to offer – and it's great fun! Each character has unique abilities and traits that you need to use to clear various obstacles. Dancer Primrose can lure people to follow her, whilst Tressa uses her merchant experience to buy items from most NPCs. It's drop-dead beautiful, with detailed sprites and fluid animation, and its unique special effects add flavour to the game. The soundtrack is equally as beautiful.

*Octopath Traveler* tries something fresh, and it succeeds in doing so despite some repetition and lack of focus in an overarching story. ●

★★★★★





# THE DARK SIDE OF **TIME TRAVEL**

Time travel stories can be cheery wish-fulfilment, but anime has explored their darker sides, as Andrew Osmond explains. Warning: time travel's full of SPOILERS!

FOR A DEMONSTRATION of how time-travel can change from a daydream to a nightmare, consider early *Doctor Who*. The series began in 1963 by introducing the friendliest, cutest time machine imaginable; a London police box, magically huge on the inside, which took you to any time you wanted. But a couple of years later, the series ran a story in which the Daleks developed a time machine A-Bomb, a *Time Destructor*. At the end, the Destructor activates, ageing the Doctor's brave female companion of the day to death and dust.

In anime too, time travel was once just an innocent daydream. One anime film (actually two) that British viewers probably haven't seen, but that many Japanese viewers have, was *Nobita's Dinosaur*, spun off from the *Doraemon* kids' series about a blue robot cat. Doraemon (the cat's name) has his own time machine, and transports the show's young characters to the age of the dinosaurs for a thrilling adventure. Doraemon's team protects the creatures from dino-hunters from the future, suggesting that someone had read Ray Bradbury's classic short story, *A Sound of Thunder*. The story was so popular that it was made as a cinema film twice, in 1980 and 2006.

There are plenty of other kids' anime that use upbeat time travel plots, such as *Pokemon 4Ever* and the franchise-uniting *Yu-Gi-Oh! Bonds Beyond Time*. But recent anime has increasingly realised the darker, more anguished potential of time stories. It's impossible to discuss these anime without SPOILERS, especially as many don't *advertise* the time travel, including the big anime blockbuster of the 2010s. Time travel is used as a twist, a joker card to

reveal what you've been watching is back-to-front and turvy-topsy.

That's true in Makoto Shinkai's blockbusting *Your Name.*, which starts as a modern teen take on the body swap fantasy – a boy and girl switch into each others' bodies, seemingly by magic – and then reveals halfway through that it's a time travel story. On one level, it's in the tradition of the '90s American series *Quantum Leap* and the 2011 film *Source Code*. In such stories, travellers inhabit strangers' bodies, trying to prevent terrible disasters in the past – in *Quantum Leap*'s words, “putting right what once went wrong”. The excellent anime thriller *Erased* is another variant; its hero “leaps” back into himself as a child, 18 years in the past, to bring down a serial killer.

But the way *Your Name.* is constructed makes a big difference. Most of its first half is shown through the eyes of the girl character, Mitsuha, who we happily follow through her body-changing adventures... and *then* we find out that Mitsuha, her family, and her friends are all dead, wiped out by a disaster; in a sense they were dead the whole “time.” It's a massive dislocating shock – reminiscent, incidentally, of a *non-time* travel film, 2007's *Rendition*, which plays a similar trick with viewer perceptions. It gives the viewer a sense of terrifying giddiness. No more is there a reliable “now”; a timeframe in which the characters are alive dissolves into one where they're already dead.

It's not the only light anime time travel film that suddenly became shockingly heavy. A decade before *Your Name.*, Mamoru Hosoda's *The Girl Who Leapt Through Time* has a heroine, Makoto, who's delighted with her





Your Name.



Puella Magi  
Madoka Magica



Erased



The Girl Who Leapt  
Through Time



Re:Zero

time travel powers, exploiting them to fix awkward situations. But things start backfiring; in trying to fix up friendships, she starts souring them for herself, while the events she alters start terrible chain reactions. It culminates in a bell tolling, two bodies falling in front of an oncoming train, and Makoto, her time leaps used up, screaming “STOP!” helplessly at the world.

In film, the best-known “Japanese” time-travel story internationally may be the live-action *Edge of Tomorrow* with Tom Cruise; it was based on a Japanese novel (not a light novel, as it’s often described) called *All You Need is Kill* by Hiroshi Sakurazaka. In both book and film, the hero spends a lot of time dying violently before being “reset” to an earlier point and setting out towards his next messy death. *Edge of Tomorrow* plays up the situation’s dark humour more than the book, especially in its choice of actor. If you wanted to see the normally indestructible Tom Cruise getting killed again and again *and again*, then *Edge of Tomorrow*’s your film. As of writing, a script’s still “in the works” for a possible sequel.

*Edge of Tomorrow*’s closest anime equivalent is the recently-released series *Re:Zero*. It plays in the first episode like a standard “boy goes to fantasy world” yarn before the boy starts dying – very nastily, most of the time – and looping back for another go. While the series has some very funny comedy, it can go way darker than *Edge of Tomorrow*, with the long-suffering hero driven into hysteria, even madness. Apart from the physical agony of the hero’s deaths, the show points up his loss of any sense of “now” or “reality”. If every moment he

lives will be erased and rewritten by the next reset, then his existence has the substance of a nightmare.

If you’re into such time-travelling psycho-horror, other anime have explored it too. A prominent example using the trappings of science-fiction is *Steins;Gate* (see our Expose on *Steins;Gate 0* this issue). Two dark fantasy riffs on the theme are *When They Cry*, to be released by MVM later this year, and *Puella Magi Madoka Magica*. These anime revolve round ensembles of characters, most of them cheerfully unaware of the horrors encircling and looping them. But one unlucky character does know, or comes to know, what’s going on, and may even be responsible for it.

But the *Ground Zero* for dark anime about timelost characters is a film that we don’t usually think of as having time travel. Satoshi Kon’s classic *Perfect Blue* will have a lavish new edition from Anime Limited later this year. In it, a young actress wanders a maze of collapsing realities and recurring scenes, killing or being killed, with madness her only sanity. *Perfect Blue*’s time travel needs no machine or magic curse; it’s all entirely in the head. ●

## THE HATEFUL EIGHT

Anime’s most infamous time-twisting storyline doesn’t traumatise its characters, who are all going on their summer holiday... again, and again, and again. Yes, we mean the “Endless Eight” arc in *Haruhi Suzumiya*, eight near-identical episodes which put faithful viewers through their own personal *Groundhog Day* hell.





## [ANIME REVIEW]

## JUNJO ROMANTICA SEASON ONE

## Three's a Crowd

10 SEPTEMBER // ANIME LIMITED // CERT TBC // COMEDY, ROMANCE, YAOI // £34.99 (BLU-RAY) // 300 MINS // 12 EPISODES

**PLOT** *Junjo Romantica* follows three couples – or aspiring couples – with each pair facing their own trials and tribulations. Unrequited love, misunderstandings, age gaps and more are ripe in *Junjo Romantica*, and it wears its yaoi badge with great pride.

*Junjo Romantica* is an uncomfortable watch – and that's clearly not due to the same-sex subject matter, but rather in its characters' relentless pursuit of their romantic goals. In a similar way to some otome anime (particularly *Amnesia*),

many of the men are simply creepy and forceful. The truly sweet moments are washed away by displeasing behaviours and shockingly large age gaps, and there's a lot to look past to be able to enjoy this one – although that's easier said than done.

The show has an otome-like art style which is distinct and easy on the eyes, although it is showing its age now, and it has character designs which are sometimes a tad too similar to easily tell apart – which is important with such a large cast. What it does do is handle the story transition between couples with ease, and you're bound to care about some more than others.

*Junjo Romantica* doesn't live up to the "romantic" in its title, and it's only recommended for hardcore yaoi fans. Those simply looking for a romance or comedy anime are better looking elsewhere, and there are better options for same-sex relationships or implications in anime – try *Yuri!!! On Ice*. ●

☆☆☆☆

WORDS BY ALEX JONES

## A GREAT DIRECTOR

Chiaki Kon is the director of many notable anime including *Golden Time* and *Sailor Moon Crystal*, and she's also directed episodes of *Bleach*.



## AOHARU X MACHINEGUN No guns blazing

27 AUGUST // ANIME LIMITED // CERT 15 // SPORT // £29.99 (DVD), £34.99 (BLU-RAY) // 325 MINS // 12 EPISODES

**PLOT** When Hotaru Tachibana storms a host club to avenge her friend, the last thing she expected was to lose an airsoft duel to their most popular host. This leads her to join Toy Gun Gun – if only she didn't have to hide the fact she's a girl!

Cramming the story of an ongoing manga into a one cour series isn't a problem unique to *Aoharu x Machinegun*, but it is a show that demonstrates exactly why this is never a good idea. Both the initial story setup and even the survival games themselves feel like barely a footnote on the overall story, which quickly becomes far too preoccupied with setting up

conflicts that could easily be solved if the cast were just honest with each other.

It's a shame because Hotaru is a great lead, free from both the cliché of being instantly gifted at airsoft and also because the case of mistaken gender isn't an element the show runs into the ground. Instead it's just one facet in the show's various bits of miscommunication, but also sadly one that isn't properly addressed in its rather abrupt ending.

With a few more episodes to focus on actual enjoyment of the survival games, *Aoharu x Machinegun* could have been a reasonably good sports drama focusing on something a little different from the norm. Instead, it's a disappointingly rushed affair that focuses too much on forcing drama and not enough on telling an enjoyable story. ●

☆☆☆☆

## J-CULTURE

Survival games are an extremely popular activity across Japan, not only with military otaku but also couples out on dates. One camp even runs a Father's Day event!



# Black \* Clover

## Quartet Knights



14 SEPT 2018



12  
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PS4

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Entertainment



WORDS BY ANDREW OSMOND

# NEO RELEASE ROUND-UP

## THE STATE OF THE UK MARKET THIS MONTH

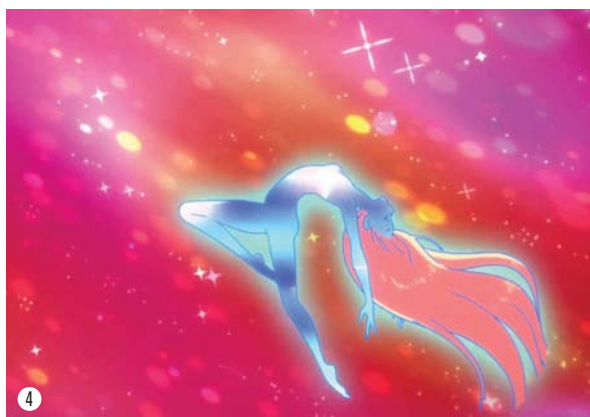
WHO'S UP FOR a gamer comedy? *And You Thought There's Never A Girl Online?* will be released by MVM on 10 September on Blu-ray and DVD. Originally broadcast in 2016, it's about a group of school-aged youngsters who've all played the same online RPG (okay, MMORPG for pedants), and the fall-out that ensues when they meet in real life. Clue: it's not a sausage party.

Another new, or at least partially new, title is *Eureka Seven: Hi-Evolution Movie 1*, a movie reworking of the epic *Eureka Seven* mecha adventure series. Like the TV original, the film's being handled by Anime Limited, which will bring it out on 28 August in a Collectors combi Blu-ray / DVD, plus a separate Blu-ray and DVD. Much of the film consists of remixed footage from the TV show, but it also has new material – in particular, a depiction of the fabled “Summer of Love” apocalypse that was never shown on TV. Fans are pretty much agreed, though, that you do need to have seen the TV show first.

Then there's *Battle Girls High School*, scheduled for 17 September on Blu-ray from MVM. With a title like that, any further description may seem redundant, but it's a smartphone game adaptation in which the Earth is invaded and “ordinary” cute schoolgirls must save humanity, because Japan.

Beyond that, the big franchise warhorses are still galloping, returning on 20 August courtesy of Manga Entertainment (both as DVDs). Box 33 of *Naruto Shippuden* takes the ninja kid to episode 430, meaning he has just (!) 70 episodes to go to the end of the series, though definitely not the franchise. On the seafaring side, *One Piece* Collection 18 takes Luffy and his crew to part 445 of their exploits. If you're keeping track, that means they're sailing through episodes first broadcast on TV in 2010; a mere 400 have been made since then.

Slightly delayed in the schedule, MVM's standard Blu-ray of *Fate/stay night Unlimited Blade Works* should arrive on 27 August. That's the first half of the TV series; the second follows on 10 September. The fourth and last part of Anime



1. *And You Thought There's Never A Girl Online?* coming this September from MVM! 2. Only 70 episodes left by the end of *Naruto 33*! Luckily, it's not quite the end of the *Naruto* world... 3. Check NEO 178 for a review of *Sword Oratoria* 4. Looking for our *Flip Flappers* review? It's in NEO 176!

Limited's *Sword Art Online II* (the standard Blu-ray) should be with us on 20 August.

Look to last month's issue of NEO for our reviews of *Asterisk War Part 1*, which is released on DVD and Blu-ray on 27 August, and *Sword Oratoria*, which has a combi Blu-ray / DVD release on 3 September. Finally, *Flip Flappers* comes to Blu-ray on the same day; we reviewed it in NEO 176. All these releases are from MVM. ●



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## [FILM REVIEW]

# JACKIE CHAN'S POLICE STORY AND POLICE STORY 2

The art of breaking glass with your face

20 AUGUST // EUREKA // CERT 15 // ACTION // £29.99 (BLU-RAY) // 221 MINS

**PLOT** In *Police Story*, Hong Kong cop Chan Ka-Kui (Jackie Chan) is assigned to protect Salina (Brigitte Lin), the girlfriend of drug lord Cho (Chor Yuen), so she can testify against him – but Koo is determined to silence her. In *Police Story 2*, Ka-Kui faces a dangerous gang of explosive experts.

In the mid-1980s, period kung fu movies were out of fashion. While Jackie Chan had hinted at a more contemporary approach to Hong Kong cinema with *Project A* in 1983, Sammo Hung accelerated the process of modernising the Hong Kong action film with *Wheels On Meals* and *Heart Of The Dragon*. Not to be outdone by his senior from the Peking Opera academy, Chan unveiled *Police Story* in 1985 on which he served as star, co-writer, director, theme song singer, and as action director alongside his team of stuntmen.

Three decades later, it's easy to take Chan's accomplishments for granted, but *Police Story* still contains some of the most audacious, jaw-dropping stunt-work in his remarkable career. The opening police sting includes an orgy of destruction as Chan crashes a car down a mountain, levelling an entire shanty town in the process, followed by a daredevil sequence in which he hangs from a moving bus

using an umbrella, dodging traffic all the while. Then there's the final showdown against the villains in a department store which climaxes with Chan performing a death-defying slide down live electric cables, light bulbs shattering and sparks flying as he goes. No one, but no one, could top this now or then.

That said, when Chan is not risking life and limb, the film isn't quite so dazzling. Maggie Cheung has a thankless role as Ka-Kui's girlfriend May, convinced he's cheating on her with Salina and generally subjected to plenty of pratfalls. The humour in the script hasn't all aged well. To convince Salina that she needs his protection, Ka-Kui asks his friend Kim (Mars) to dress up as a burglar, break into her apartment and attack her. Similarly, there's a skit when Ka-Kui is on duty and trying to answer three different phone calls simultaneously, one of which is someone trying to report domestic violence, which is played for laughs. There was definitely no #MeToo in 1985.

The script pits Ka-Kui as the underdog facing corrupt lawyers and the incompetence of his Superintendent (Lam Gwok-Hung), all of which piles up the character's frustration until it explodes in the showdown in the shopping mall. That sequence set a new record for the amount of fake glass smashed in a film, much of it broken by Chan himself using his face. It's a frighteningly physical performance that borders on masochism, but it's undeniably spectacular.

*Police Story 2*, released in 1988, picks up the story where the first film finished as Cho vows revenge on Ka-Kui, who

## EXTRAS

Lots of extras here, including Jonathan Ross's *Son Of The Incredibly Strange Film Show* documentary about Chan, three different edits of each film, and an archive interview with Benny Lai.





has been demoted for insubordination. Once again, the movie features some incredible set pieces that showcase the talents of Chan and his action team, including a series of stunts as Ka-Kui jumps between the roofs of moving vehicles, and a brilliantly conceived brawl in a playground that highlights Chan's skill at utilizing the environment to maximum effect

**"...IT'S EASY TO TAKE CHAN'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS FOR GRANTED, BUT POLICE STORY STILL CONTAINS SOME OF THE MOST AUDACIOUS, JAW-DROPPING STUNT-WORK IN HIS REMARKABLE CAREER."**

in a fight scene. The script repeats the plot device from the first movie of pitting Ka-Kui against Superintendent Li when May is kidnapped by the bombers and Ka-Kui is forced to collect the ransom for them. Less effective is the decision to put Ka-Kui against the mute explosives expert played by Benny Lai. Usually in martial arts and action cinema, the hero has to overcome a more powerful opponent, but while Lai's character is meant to be faster and more skilled than Ka-Kui, the actor is physically much smaller than Chan. Not only that, his character is handicapped, which means that the audience has to root for

Ka-Kui as he fights a tiny disabled man. Combined with the way that Ka-Kui mocks his opponent's speech impairment, the scene leaves an unpleasant taste in the mouth.

In addition to Chan and Maggie Cheung, the two films share several cast members, including Bill Tung as Uncle Bill, who has a strong comic chemistry with Chan. Much of Chan's best humour tends to be physical. His admiration of the heroes of silent cinema like Harold Lloyd, Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton was most clearly on display in *Project A*, where the early 20th century setting lent itself to such references, but that sensibility informs some of the gags in both *Police Story* films. The aforementioned telephone scene is a great example – whether or not the dialogue works, it's hard to deny that the physicality of the sequence, with Chan juggling multiple phones and props, shows he can do small scale slapstick just as well as the bigger stunts.

The masochism of the first *Police Story* finds even fuller expression in the sequel, with Chan taking some big tumbles, and a torture sequence where he is tied up and pelted with firecrackers. It's interesting to see how the franchise changed direction for the third instalment, 1996's *Supercop*, going for a lighter tone without the suffering.

***Police Story* ranks alongside *Supercop* and *Project A* as amongst Chan's very finest work. *Police Story 2* doesn't quite manage to equal the brilliance of the first film, but it's hard to think of many action filmmakers operating on the same level. Two films no Chan fan should be without. ●**

★★★★☆

**1.** It was the worst case of heartburn and indigestion that Ka-Kui had ever seen.

**2.** Maggie was nervous before riding her scooter down to Brighton for another weekend of Mods vs. Rockers fights. **3.** The ticket inspectors on Hong Kong buses don't take any nonsense. **4.** That little pistol won't be enough, Ka-Kui. You have an entire shanty town to demolish.

## IF YOU LIKE THIS

Chan played Ka-Kui on three further occasions for director Stanley Tong – *Police Story III: Supercop*, *Police Story IV: First Strike*, and in the Michelle Yeoh vehicle *Supercop 2*.



## MANGA EXTRACT

# BIRD IN THE HAND A MINI MURDER MYSTERY 3

By Morag Lewis

THIS ISSUE, WE'VE got an extract from another *Mini Murder Mystery* from Morag Lewis – a cool series of short stories that include all the clues you need to find whodunit! “As with the others, this is a tiny murder mystery,” Lewis said. “A suspicious character has been killed after having been released from prison, and Nikiruka has to figure out why.

“This is the start of the story,” Lewis told us, of the action on the following pages. “Nikiruka, the bookseller with the cart (and tortoise), has assisted the Vigiles in the past, and now he is being asked for help once again. His friend in the Vigiles, Chiamaka, has herself been arrested on suspicion of committing a crime. The extract includes Chiamaka’s description of the events leading up to the crime, before Nikiruka sets off to talk to the other people involved.”

We asked Lewis to tell us how this instalment fit in with the previous titles in the series. “It features the same characters; Chiamaka the Vigilante, and Nikiruka, who has helped in the past connecting the dots which make up a story. It’s different in that this time Nikiruka is on his own, since Chiamaka has to wait in the station.”

Of the reaction to the series so far, Morag told us, “what I’ve heard is that people like them and sometimes guess correctly and sometimes not – which is ideal. But I haven’t had much direct feedback; I would love some more.”

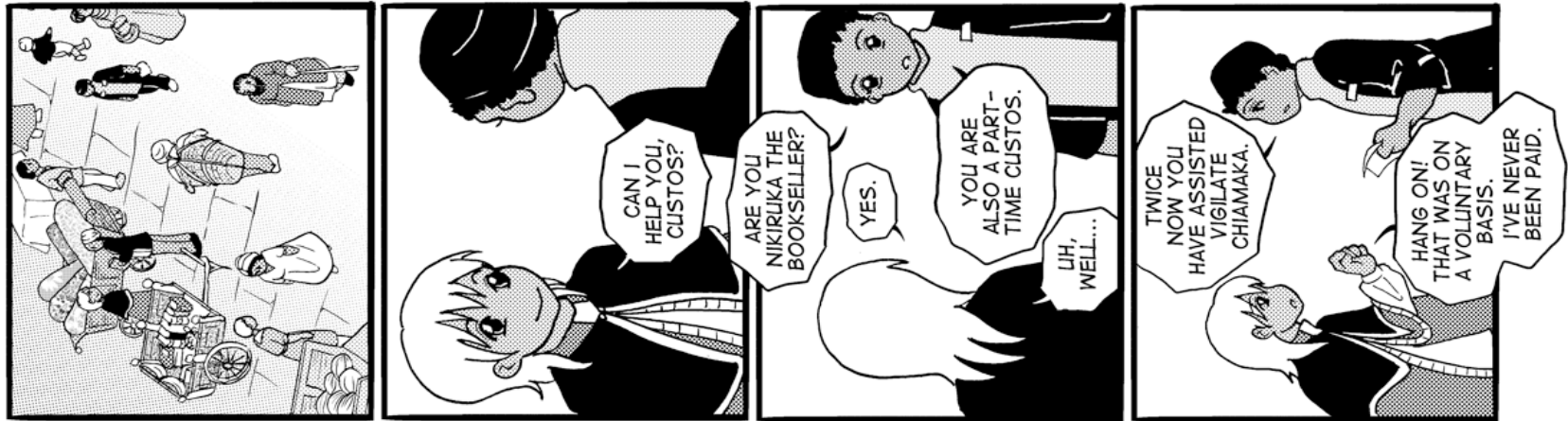
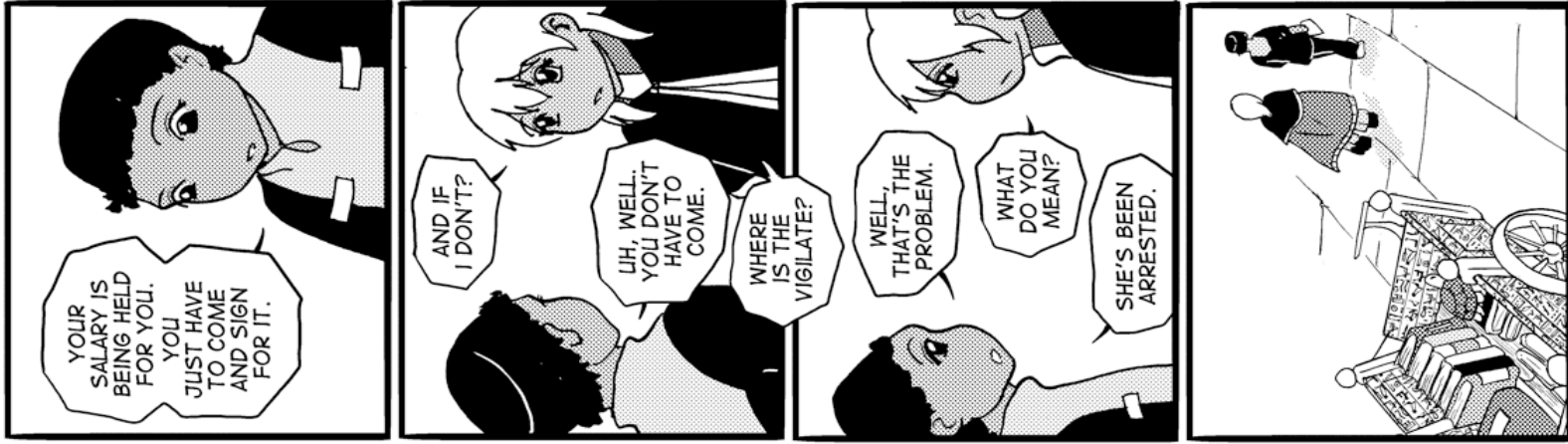
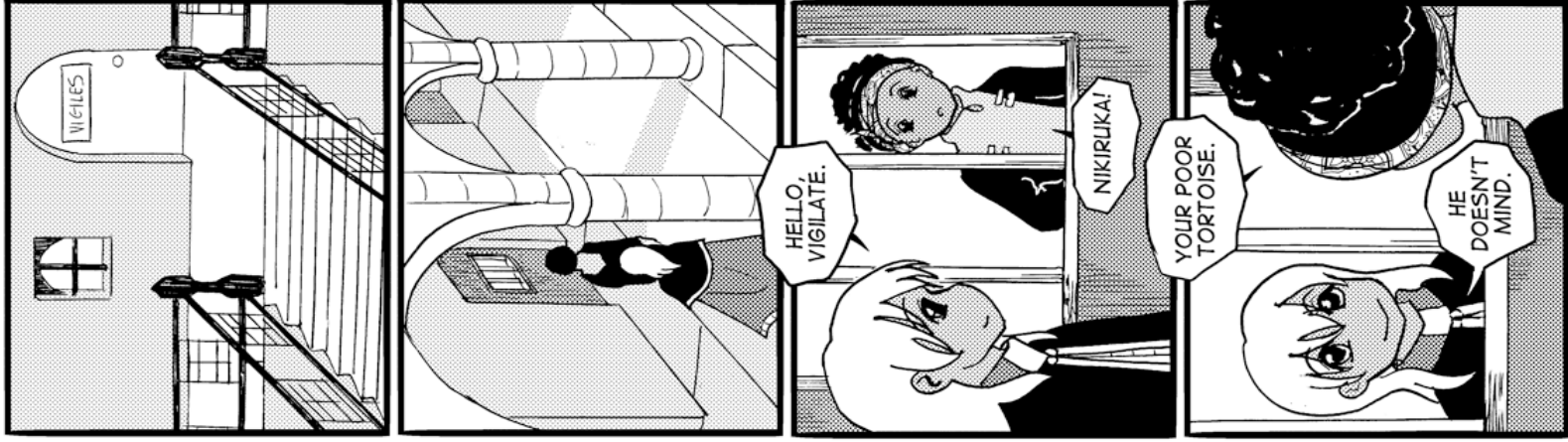
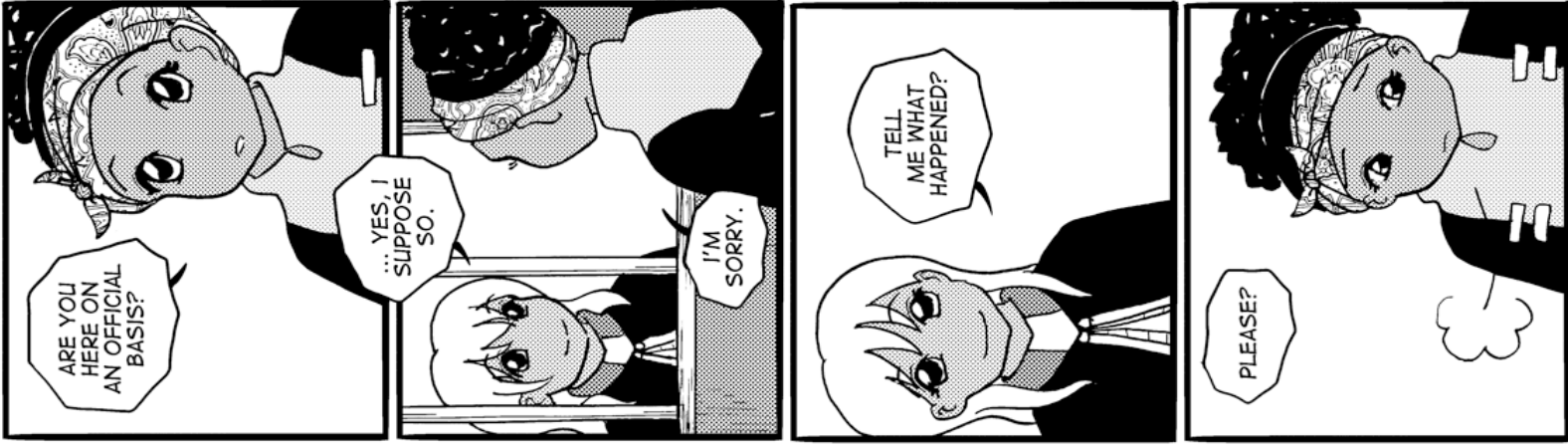
We wondered what Lewis’ favourite murder mystery story in fiction was. “Dorothy L Sayers’ Lord Peter Wimsey, because he changes as a character throughout the stories,” she told us. “I love Poirot and Miss Marple, but they don’t actually change and develop very much, for all that there are loads of stories about both. Lord Peter changes over the arc of his stories, and I really like that.”

Lewis also filled us in on her other ongoing projects. “I have an ongoing webcomic, *A Pocketful of Clouds*, about the inhabitants of a village above the clouds. It’s gentle comedy with a bit of fantasy mixed in. My other main series at the moment is *Defenders of the Sunset City*, a story based around a single day in the lives of a group of young people who are waiting in a ruined city for their parents and relatives to return to them.”

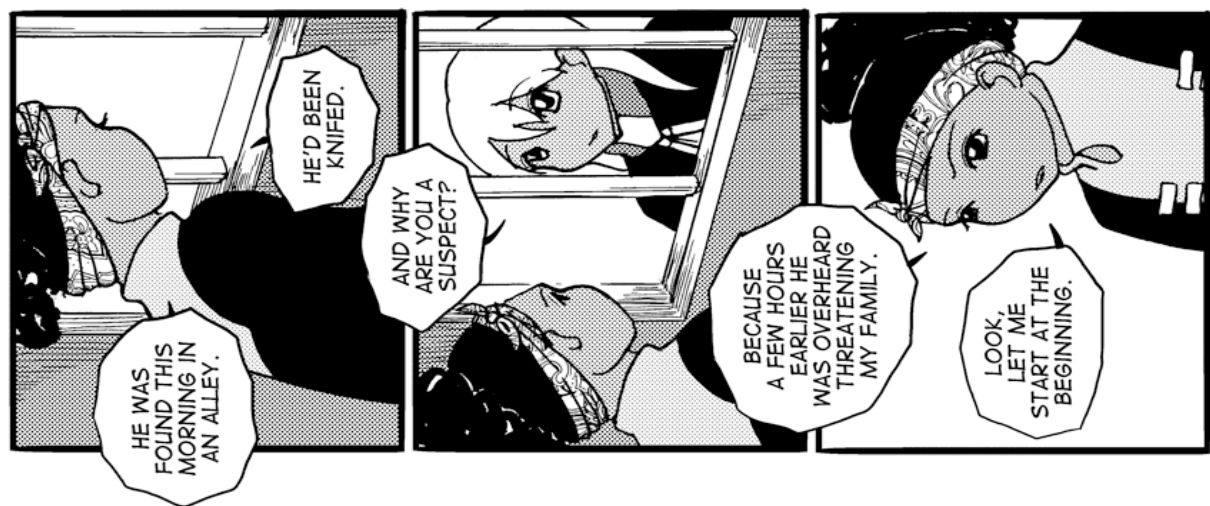
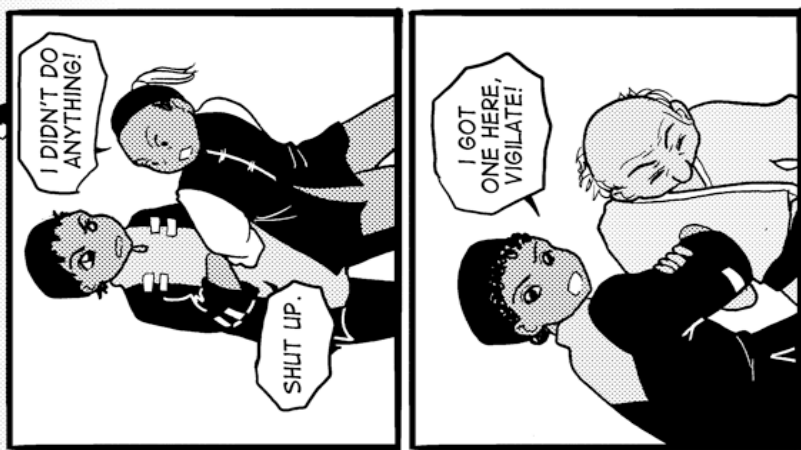
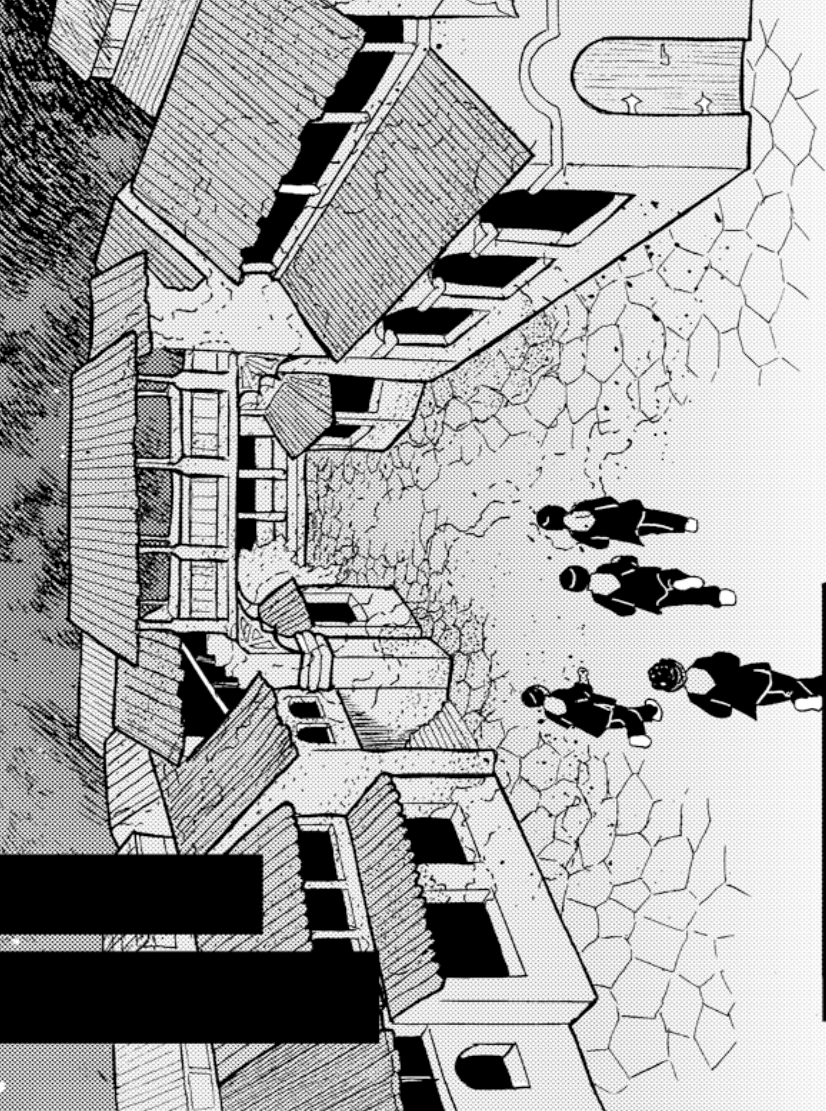
If you want to find Morag Lewis’ work online, you can find free webcomics at [toothycat.net](http://toothycat.net), and purchase paper copies at [sweatdrop.com](http://sweatdrop.com). Enjoy the extract!



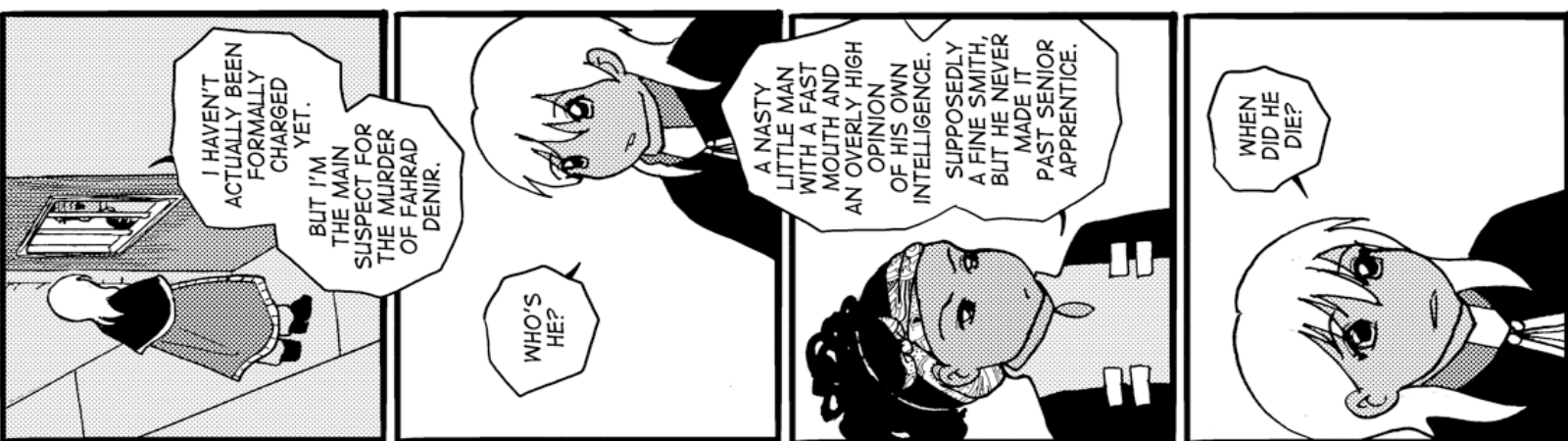








WE  
DETAINED  
FAHRAD FOUR  
DAYS AGO AS A  
SUSPECTED  
ARSONIST.





AND THEN  
THE NEXT DAY, MR  
EMEKA THE LANDLORD,  
WHOSE SHOP IS  
NEARBY, REPORTED  
A ROBBERY.

IT TURNS  
OUT THE SECURITY  
GUARD, ONE LEKAN  
JARED, WENT TO HELP  
WITH THE BLAZE -  
BECAUSE IT WAS  
HIS FAMILY'S  
STALL.

THE LOCK  
ON THE DOOR  
HAD BEEN FORCED  
AND ALL THE  
PETTY CASH  
WAS STOLEN.

ANYWAY,  
FAHRAD WAS  
KEPT HERE UNTIL  
YESTERDAY SO I  
COULD QUESTION  
HIM, ALONG WITH  
THE OTHER  
SUSPECTS.

I DIDN'T DO  
ANYTHING!

I NEVER  
LIT THAT  
FIRE!

SO WHAT  
WERE YOU  
DOING IN THE  
MARKETPLACE  
AFTER DARK?  
IT'S NOT  
LIKE YOU LIVE  
NEARBY.

GOT  
KICKED  
OUT.

WHAT?

HAD AN  
ARGUMENT WITH  
MY WIFE,  
DIDN'T I?

WELL,  
SHE SEEMS  
VERY KEEN  
TO SEE YOU  
NOW.

SO...  
FAHRAD DENIR,  
ABAS OMIKEL  
AND PETROS  
OCHIENG.

NO  
MOTIVES AND  
NO EVIDENCE  
FOR ANY OF  
THEM.

NO  
VIGILATE.

AND THE  
JAREDS CAN'T  
TELL US  
ANYTHING?

VIGILATE!

THEY SAY  
THEY SAW  
NOTHING.

WHEN  
ARE YOU  
GOING TO  
LET MY  
HUSBAND  
GO?!

AH, MRS  
DENIR.

IT'S BEEN  
THREE DAYS!  
YOU CAN'T  
JUST HOLD  
PEOPLE HERE  
FOREVER!

IN THE  
END, I  
COULDN'T  
FIND THE  
ARSONIST.

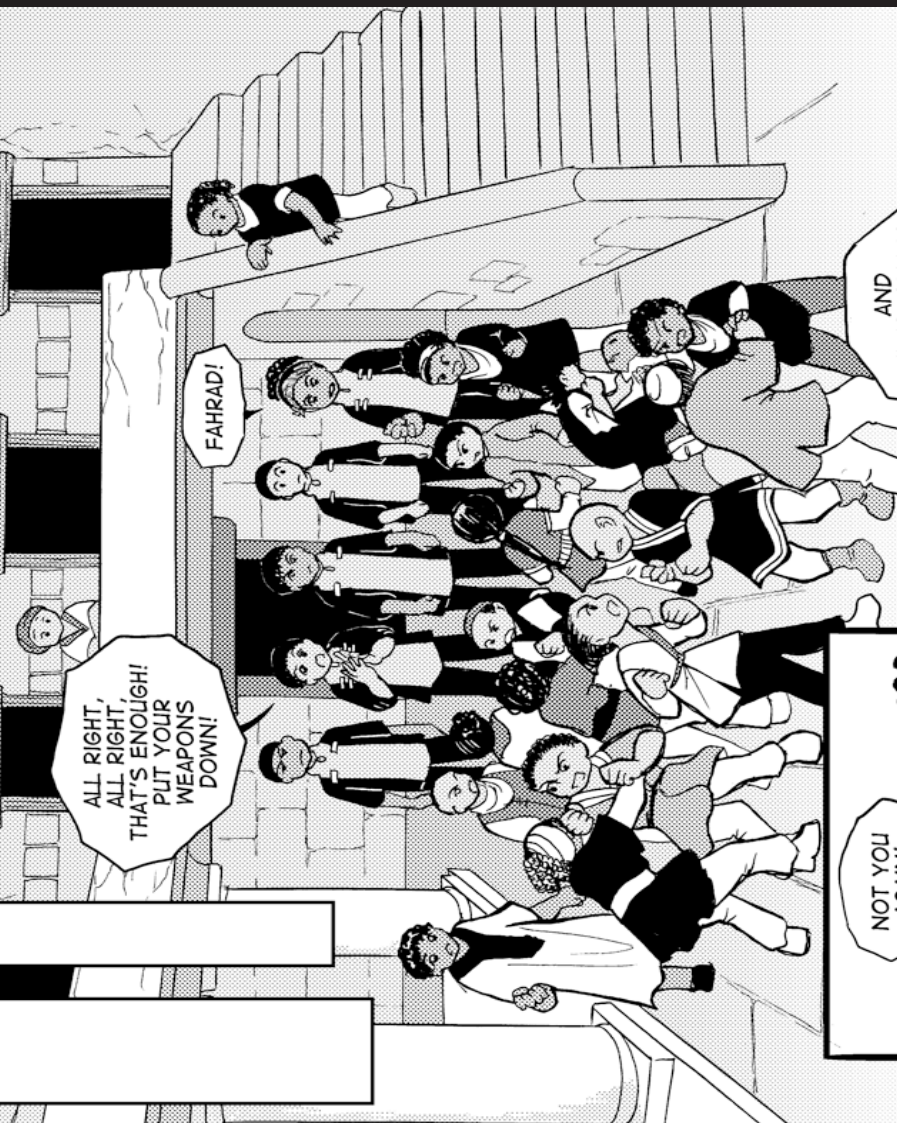
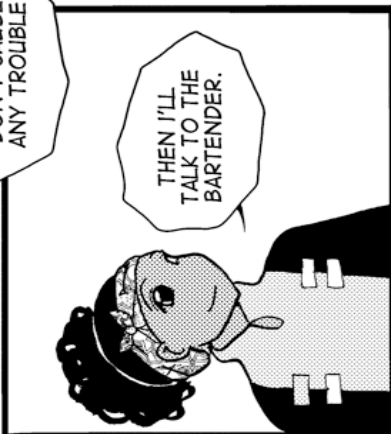
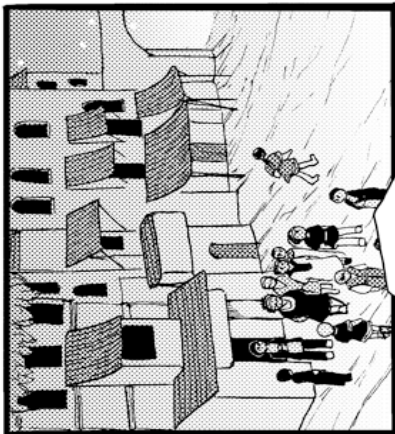
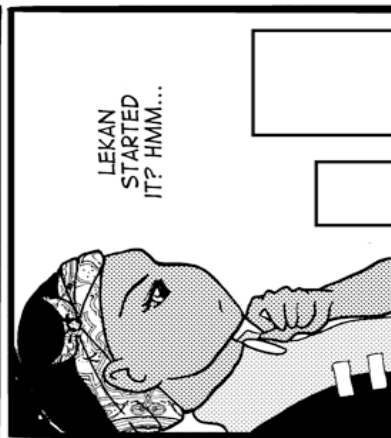
IT MIGHT  
EVEN HAVE  
BEEN THE  
JAREDS, TRYING  
TO GET OUT OF  
THEIR FINANCIAL  
OBLIGATIONS.  
THEY ARE  
HEAVILY IN  
DEBT.

I COULDN'T  
LINK ANYONE  
TO THE ROBBERY,  
EITHER. SO I  
HAD TO LET  
THEM GO.

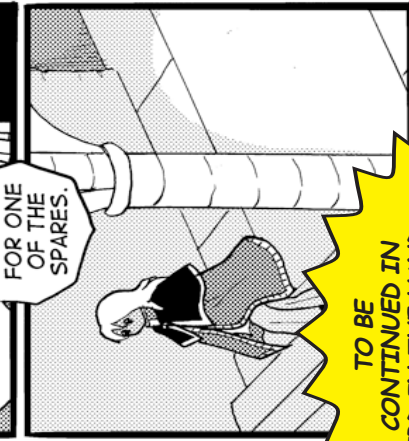
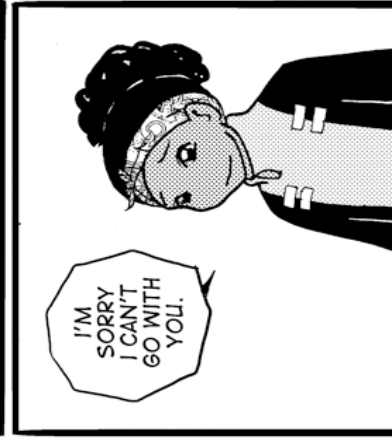
AT LEAST  
IT MEANT  
FAHRAD'S WIFE  
GOT TO TOW  
HIM AWAY.

THEN LAST  
NIGHT WE WERE  
CALLED TO A  
TAVERN  
BRAWL.









TO BE CONTINUED IN BIRD IN THE HAND...



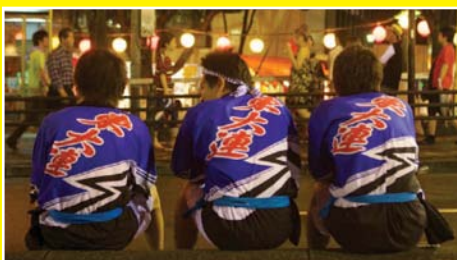
# NEXT ISSUE



## HAPPY SUGAR LIFE

DON'T BE FOOLED BY THE CUTE NAME: THIS IS A STORY OF LOVE... AND MURDER...

© Rangl Thompson-McColl



© Harry Stonley

## SUMMER FESTIVALS

MARK GUTHRIE CELEBRATES JAPAN'S MATSURI SEASON WITH A GUIDE TO THE COUNTRY'S BEST FESTIVALS



## BANANA FISH

ADAPTED FROM THE CRITICALLY ACCLAIMED MANGA BY AKIMI YOSHIDA, CAN THIS SHOW LIVE UP TO THE HYPE?

PLUS: BACK TO [MANGA] SCHOOL / VALKYRIA CHRONICLES 4 / KIZNAIVER + MORE!

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Telephone 01202 087627

Email [mail@neomag.co.uk](mailto:mail@neomag.co.uk)

Web [www.uncookedmedia.com](http://www.uncookedmedia.com)

### The NEO Team

Editor Gemma Cox

Group Art Editor Claire Trent

Contributors David West, Jonathan Clements,  
Mark Guthrie, Tom Smith, Jacob Boniface,  
Andrew Osmond, Mitchell Lineham, Michael  
Dodson, Leeann Hamilton, Emily Valentine, Alex  
Jones and Mahiru Kurumizawa

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### Customer Services

+44 (0)1202 087627  
[contact@selectps.com](mailto:contact@selectps.com)

### Subscription Enquiries

+44 (0)1202 087627  
[chris@selectps.com](mailto:chris@selectps.com)

### Advertising & Marketing

Group Commercial Manager Rob Cox  
[rob@uncookedmedia.com](mailto:rob@uncookedmedia.com)

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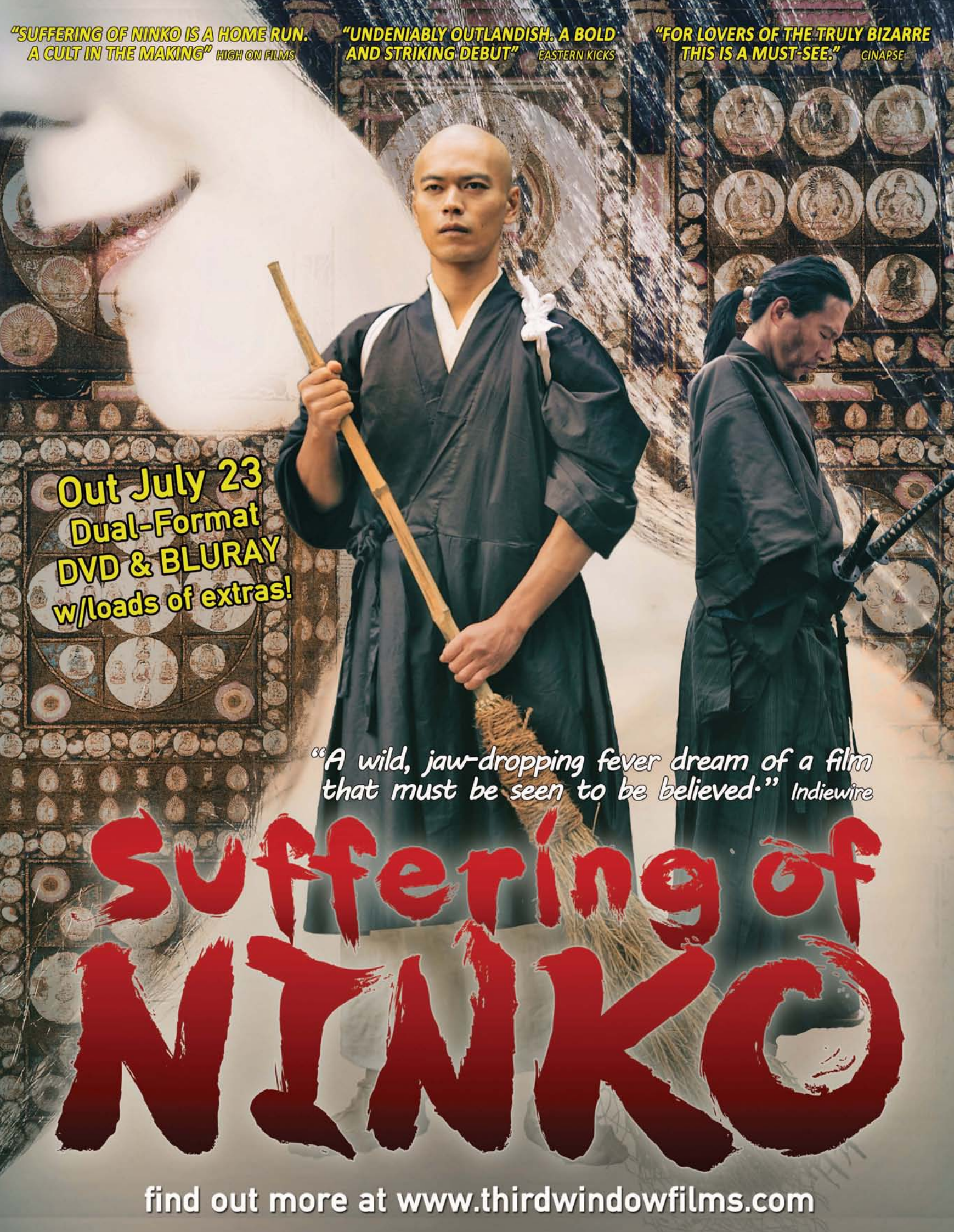
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# Location, Location, Location

The locations in the Yakuza franchise are almost as important as the characters themselves!  
NEO takes a tour of Kamurocho and Sotenbori.

WHEN IT COMES to exploring Japan, you could hop on a jet plane and spend 11-16 hours travelling – or you could just fire up *Yakuza Kiwami 2* and experience it like a true gangster. While YK2's frequent beatings aren't typical of the usual stroll around Japan's big cities, the game has managed to capture many of the other real life details that create a scarily authentic tourist experience. The locations have been painstakingly created in order to provide a realistic backdrop to the yakuza shenanigans that make up the gameplay, so while the characters and the plot are larger than life, Kamurocho and Sotenbori could be real places. In fact, they nearly are. They're based on Kabukicho in Shinjuku Japan, and Osaka's Dotonbori area, respectively. "It's probably not too hard to figure out if you know Japan," series producer Daisuke Sato tells us.

## KABUKICHO

Anchoring the locations in these two hotspots not only gives the game's designers a template upon which to build, but it also piggybacks on the reputations of the existing sites. Kabukicho is the perfect prototype for Kamurocho – Shinjuku's red light district, it contains scores of love hotels, host and hostess clubs, karaoke bars, restaurants, shops and nightclubs, earning it the nickname 'Sleepless Town'.

The area in which Kabukicho rests was a residential area until World War II, when Tokyo was bombed extensively. Plans to build a kabuki theatre in the area post-war never went ahead, but the name stuck, and the area has been

called Kabukicho ever since (with the 'cho' part meaning 'town'). The area was swiftly developed and is now a vibrant, bustling hotspot – albeit one with a seedy reputation.

Visitors are more likely to be hassled to enter business premises like host bars or restaurants than experience any kind of criminal activity, but real-life yakuza do operate in this area, and one of Tokyo's big projects in the run up to the 2020 Olympics is to clean up Kabukicho's act. Harassment, aggressive hawking, and scams are a problem, and bill-padding (or bottakuri) is apparently on the rise. This is a common scam in almost every big city with an influx of tourists, and involves a promise of cheap booze and entertainment that ends with a hefty bill and intimidation tactics to pay up. Very yakuza... But visitors to the area should rest assured that Tokyo in general is incredibly safe, and keeping your wits about you and checking for reviews online should steer you right!

## KAMUROCHO

Of course, not everything in the game is a carbon copy of real life. Elements have been added or removed for gameplay reasons, and Kamurocho is not an exact copy of Kabukicho. "This goes back to designing the cities off of places that actually exist and how we attempt to be as realistic as possible," Sato told us. "But if we find that an area is lacking something or is just a big hassle to move through during gameplay, we often expand or shrink it as needed. Since the player will travel through so many locations and stores throughout





**"THE LOCATIONS IN ANY YAKUZA GAME ARE PARAMOUNT TO THE WHOLE EXPERIENCE. THE DEV TEAM RESEARCHES EACH CITY AND PUTS AN INCREDIBLE AMOUNT OF EFFORT INTO REALIZING THE TINIEST DETAILS, AND I THINK THAT'S PART OF WHAT MAKES THIS WHOLE SERIES SO SPECIAL."** SCOTT STRICHART, LOCALISATION PRODUCER

the story, we want to make sure it doesn't bore them. The scenario is given to the planner in charge of level design, and from there, the artists take over and build it out."

We asked Scott Strichart, localisation producer, to tell us what his favourite game event to take place in Kamurocho is. "For this game, it's gotta be the "Be My Baby" substory. You've probably seen gifs of this online, but regardless... Don't miss it." We have to add... you may be disturbed, but it'll be worth it...

Strichart also shared his favourite NPC in the area with us. "That would be best boy, Nishida," he said. "No matter how much crap he takes from Majima, he's always there, backing him up, using his Essence of Defence in the Clan Creator to keep the company afloat. Absolute hero."

Of his favourite place in Kamurocho, Strichart enthusiastically told us, "the batting cages are pretty legendary.

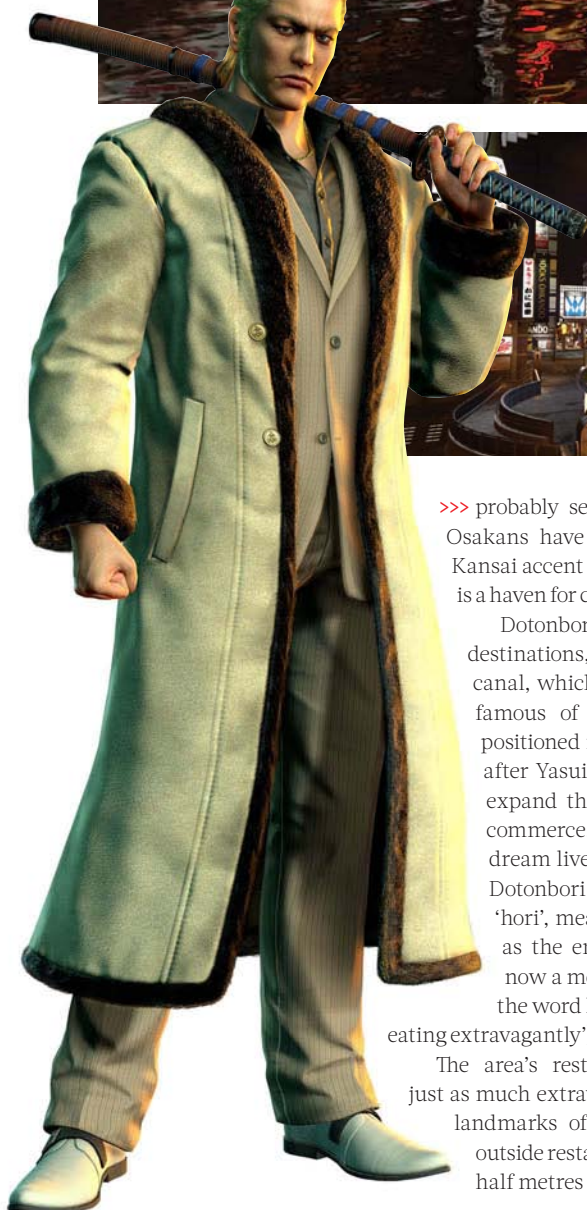
If you haven't caught on, they have a stigma about them being a place where punks hang out, and that's why there's so many sub-stories where you have to beat people up there." Kabuchiko's Shinjuku Batting Centre is a landmark of the real-life area, but don't worry – the locals are there for their obsession with the national sport rather than anything else!

Fighting and chatting are your two main activities in Kamurocho, so when Strichart told us his tourist slogan for the location, we heartily agreed: "Come for the karaoke, stay for the ass-kicking!"

## DOTONBORI

If Tokyo is Japan's neon-coloured, business-minded, formal big brother, then Osaka is the comedian of the family who made his money ducking and diving, and >>>

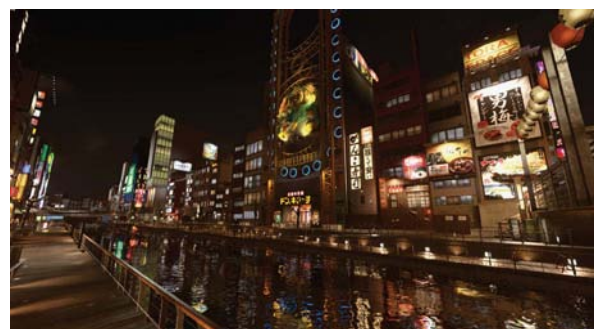




>>> probably selling takoyaki on the street corner. Osakans have a reputation for being funny (that Kansai accent helps!), direct, and social – and Osaka is a haven for cheap, tasty, local food.

Dotonbori is one of Osaka's premiere tourist destinations, characterised by the Dotonbori canal, which is flanked by neon signs – the most famous of which is the Glico running man positioned near Ebisu Bridge. The area is named after Yasui Doton, whose dream in 1612 was to expand the waterways of the area to improve commerce. He died in the Siege of Osaka, but his dream lived on, and the area became known as Dotonbori, with the 'bori' part coming from 'hori', meaning canal. The area was designated as the entertainment district in 1621, and is now a mecca for gourmants – so much so that the word kuidaore (meaning 'to ruin oneself by eating extravagantly') is heavily associated with the area.

The area's restaurants advertise themselves with just as much extravagance, and one of the most famous landmarks of Dotonbori is the mechanised crab outside restaurant Kani Doraku, which is six and a half metres high, and has moving arms and eyes.



This bright red mascot was installed in 1960 and spawned a plethora of imitators, so Dotonbori is awash with gently waving delicacies, enticing you inside to eat their friends. Kani Doraku is one of the area's most famous restaurants (where if you don't like crab, you may as well stay at home), as is Zuboraya, which sells fugu (pufferfish) and has a fugu lantern outside, and Kinryu Ramen, which is guarded by a golden dragon billboard.

## SOTENBORI

Sotenbori has been created with a bit more artistic licence than Kamurocho, but anyone who has been to Dotonbori will recognise familiar landmarks here. Neon-bright, bustling streets are full of salarymen and ne'er-do-wells, and just like its real life counterpart, the slogan 'where foodies go bankrupt' has never been more apt. Kani Doraku's mechanical crab and Zuboraya's pufferfish are prominent, as are many other 3D restaurant signs.

"Since the series is a realistic interpretation of Japan, we make it more realistic by tying it to actual businesses, and by keeping those businesses positioned as close as possible to where they'd actually be found," explains Sato. "We have to use this as the basis of our level design, but we do keep the game size, the story layout and all that in mind. After that, we can set up the necessary areas, more buildings, and more





## Kansai

Osaka, Kyoto and Kobe are all located in the Kansai region of Japan, roughly south-central on Japan's main island of Honshu. Historically, it was the centre of Japanese culture, and Kyoto is still considered by many to be a slice of old-world Japan. The traditional Osakan merchant class provide the basis for the reputation of Kansai folk being funny, warm, down to earth, and less formal than their Kanto cousins.



stores. Our design is fairly unhindered, but we don't want to sacrifice the city's uniqueness either."

You can turn your hand to golf with mini games at the Yokobori Golf Centre, and the locals are always ready and willing to provide you with the odd side-quest or two – don't expect this to happen in the real Osaka!

There's also a great side quest in the form of Club Four Shine, the struggling cabaret club which needs your help. The head hostess, Yuki, has been challenged in the Cabaret Club Grand Prix by the shady Kanzaki Group – and if she can't prove her hostesses have what it takes, the club will be ground into dust. This mini game sees you acting as the manager of the club, assigning hostesses to tables and milking those customers for as much cash as possible. Hire new talent, collaborate with local businesses, and defeat rivals to storm your way to the top of the Cabaret Club Grand Prix's leagues, and eventually defeat Club Sunshine. Only in Sotenbori...

## DEVELOPMENT

"The locations in any *Yakuza* game are paramount to the whole experience," Strichart tells us. "The dev team researches each city and puts an incredible amount of effort into realizing the tiniest details, and I think that's part of what makes this whole series so special. Try turning off your HUD and just *walk* around town

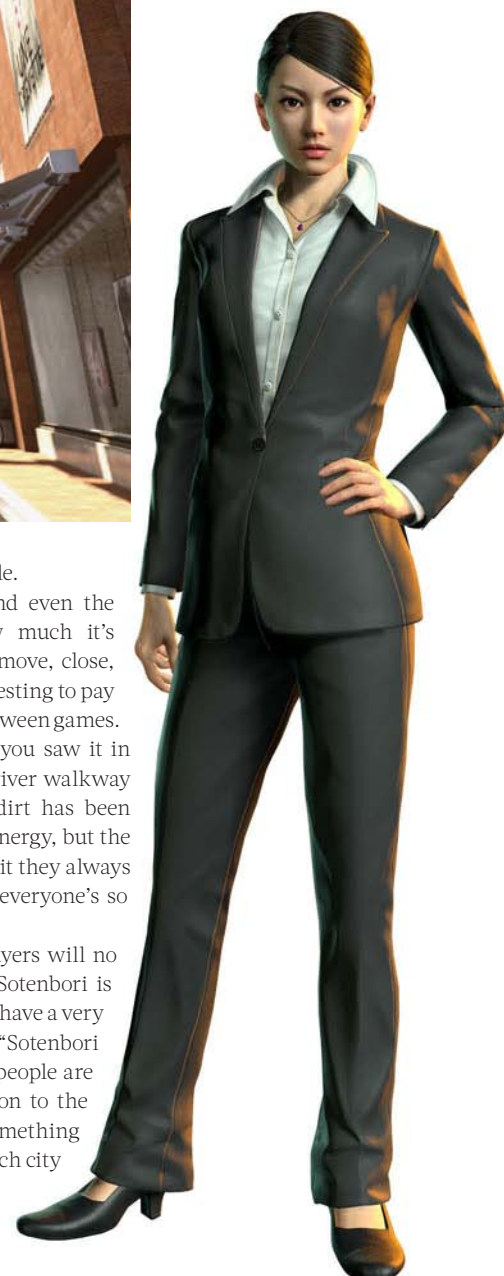
sometime. The way the city comes to life is incredible.

"Kamurocho changes with the seasons, and even the characters are always remarking about how much it's changed since the last game," he adds. "Stores move, close, re-open, only to shut down again. It's really interesting to pay attention to the subtle ways the world changes between games.

"Sotenbori wasn't in the first game, but if you saw it in *Yakuza 0*, the difference is night-and-day. The river walkway has been paved over, the '80s opulence and dirt has been replaced by a kind of modern convenience and energy, but the coolest part is that the people have the same spirit they always did. Writing for Sotenbori is the best, because everyone's so stereotypically excitable and talkative."

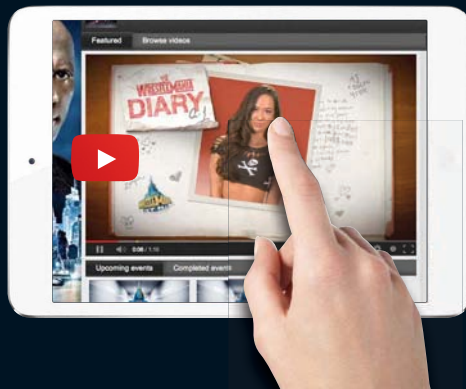
The two major locations are unique and players will no doubt have their favourite between the two. "Sotenbori is almost like the rival city of Kamurocho, and they have a very different energy about them," said Strichart. "Sotenbori is a little bit livelier and less corporate, and the people are more hot-blooded, if that's a thing. Pay attention to the conversations of NPCs in *Kiwami 2* if this is something you're interested in. They love to battle about which city is better."

But which is better? You decide, once you get your hands on *Yakuza Kiwami 2*! ●





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# THE ULTIMATE YAKUZA

The Tojo Clan is under attack once more. Can a reluctant mobster pulled out of his self-imposed retirement save the syndicate as enemies close in from all sides? NEO's David West talks to *Yakuza* series producer Daisuke Sato and localisation producer Scott Strichart to learn about gaming in the men's room, rival dragons, and beating people up with noodles in *Yakuza Kiwami 2*.





## Gangster Ink

"The tattoos are all designed by tattoo artist Horitomo," says Sato. "We provide him the character's personality and image, and sometimes we get new ideas from his choice of tattoo (dragon, koi, hannya [demon mask], etc.) too. We try to choose tattoos and designs that really convey that character's traits."

Just when I thought I was out, they pull me back in!" declares Michael Corleone in *The Godfather: Part III*. That's a sentiment sure to ring true with Kazuma Kiryu as he is dragged back into the violent underworld of Japanese organised crime in *Yakuza Kiwami 2*. He thought he'd left his bloodstained life behind him, but when Yukio Terada, chairman of the Tojo Clan, is assassinated, Kiryu is drawn back into the heart of a gang war ready to erupt into carnage at any moment. Can the man known as the Dragon Of Dojima save the Tojo Clan from those who would burn it the ground? And how many will die along the way?

The *Yakuza* series started life on the PlayStation 2 back in 2005 in Japan. *Yakuza 2* arrived the following year, although it didn't reach the west until 2008. SEGA revamped *Yakuza* for the PlayStation 4 in 2016 under the name *Yakuza Kiwami* – the latter word meaning extreme or ultimate – and now *Yakuza 2* is making the jump onto the modern console, rebuilt from the

ground up to create a richer, deeper experience.

"At least as far as the west is concerned, *Yakuza 2* was the game in the series that fans really seem to love," says Scott Strichart, Localisation Producer from SEGA Of America, "yet didn't really latch on here, probably because it was released so late in the PlayStation 2's lifecycle in a time when Japanese-only dubs were less accepted. After releasing *Yakuza 0* and *Yakuza Kiwami*, *Yakuza Kiwami 2* is the next logical step, and it's a great way for players to experience one of the best games in the series to date in a modern way."

Kiryu's tale began with him as a young member of the Tojo Clan who takes the rap for a murder committed by his pal Akira Nishikiyama. He is sent to prison for ten years. Emerging from his incarceration, Kiryu finds that everyone is scrambling to track down ten billion yen that has disappeared from the Tojo Clan's accounts, while his childhood friend Yumi has gone missing.

A struggle for control of the Tojo is only made worse by their rivals, the Omi Alliance, the Snake Flower Triad, and the MIA, using the clan's internal troubles as an opportunity to try to bring them down. The original *Yakuza* concludes with Kiryu adopting a young girl called Haruka as his ward and turning his back on the Tojo, despite being asked to assume the chairmanship.

The plot device of a gangster coming out of jail to find his clan in turmoil could have come straight from a classic Toei yakuza movie from the 1970s. Actor Bunta Sugawara specialised in playing those roles in films by director Kenji Fukasaku, notably 1971's *Sympathy For The Underdog* and the *Battles Without Honour And Humanity* series from 1973 and 1974.

Serving time in prison is a badge of honour amongst the yakuza, proof of loyalty to the clan, but invariably in these films, the protagonist finds his dedication brings little reward as rival factions struggle for power and loyalty is for sale to the highest bidder. In the gangster films of Kinji Fukasaku and Seijun

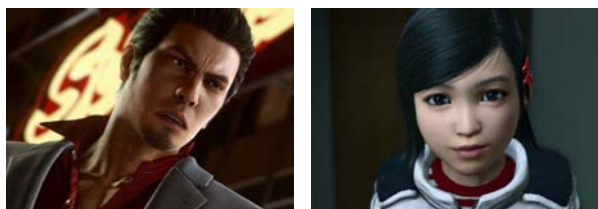






## Rise Of The Yakuza

Released on the PS4 in the west last year, *Yakuza 0* is a prequel to the acclaimed series. Set in the late 1980s, it follows the early adventures of Kazuma Kiryu and Goro Majima beginning with the former working as a debt collector and the latter running a cabaret club. Grab your copy to get your fix before *Yakuza Kiwami 2* comes out on 28 August



Suzuki, like *Kanto Wanderer*, there is always a clear difference between the 'good' yakuza – those who live by the traditional code of the clan – and 'bad' yakuza who are self-serving, greedy and utterly amoral. Oftentimes, the hero of the tale represents tradition in the face of the modern world's cynicism and avarice.

Kiryu, of course, is a good yakuza, loyal to his clan and willing to risk his life to protect little Haruka. In that regard, he's similar to that great screen hero Zatoichi the blind swordsman who, despite consorting with yakuza and all manner of disreputable lowlifes and scoundrels, is forever rescuing wayward youths, impressionable young women, and luckless orphans. Zatoichi has a code of conduct which keeps him on the side of the angels, despite all the blood that has drenched his deadly blade over the years, much like Kiryu.

## FIGHT LIKE A YAKUZA – WITH NOODLES!

The combat in *Yakuza Kiwami 2* is powered by SEGA's new Dragon Engine, offering even more mayhem than before.



"We've been revamping the battle system since *Yakuza 0* under the concept of what *Yakuza* is known for, which are controls that can make anyone feel like they're battling with a lot of style and flair," says Sato. "We've done a lot of research, even taking into account distance, the power of the hit, and the combatants' stances, and how those elements blend together in motion. We've also updated battles to take terrain, various object interactions, height differences, riding on objects, and more into account."

You can grab objects in the environment to wield in battle and pick up a weapon dropped by a fallen foe, or just pop it in your pocket in case it might come in handy later. Unarmed? No problem. Unleash Kiryu's fists and feet of fury to clobber enemies.

Players can expand and refine their fighting techniques through training sessions with Kiryu's sensei Sotaro Komaki, and Kiryu can charge his attacks during a fight if the player holds down the command button, letting his energy build >>>

1. Kiryu brawling his way through another night on the town, now rendered in more detail than ever before! 2. Tripadvisor hadn't lied. The service in this restaurant was diabolical. 3. If only he hadn't fallen into a life of crime, Majima could have been an Olympic gymnast. Probably.





## Spot The Mobster

While Sato says that yakuza are becoming harder to spot in daily life, there are still some tell-tale signs. Tattoos are inextricably associated with organised crime in Japan and are still considered unacceptable in civilian life. Anyone missing the top joint of their little finger is probably a yakuza who cut it off as an act of contrition. While senior mobsters favour traditional kimono, younger gangsters seem to favour loud suits and Hawaiian shirts, seen in Takeshi Kitano's yakuza films.

>>> up until its release in a devastating blow. As Kiryu travels around town, he can befriend the local residents, which isn't just an exercise in community building. If a tussle breaks out and there's one of your friendly neighbourhood residents close at hand, players can unlock Heat Actions. So, if Kiryu is in a scrap next to the noodle shop and he's buddies with the owner, cue a steaming, scorching bowl of ramen right to the kisser of your luckless foe. Would you like that order to go, sir?

## MAD DOGS AND DRAGONS

Every hero can only truly have their worth measured by a great adversary. In *Yakuza Kiwami 2*, Kiryu faces Ryuji Goda, the Dragon of Kansai. The son of the chairman of the Omi Alliance, Goda has a shark's instinct for detecting blood in the water and when the Tojo Clan is rocked by Terada's death, Goda knows the time is ripe to topple the Alliance's old enemies.

"After Kiryu literally wrecks the entire Tojo Clan in *Yakuza*, it was pretty essential to give him a villain that would be up to the challenge of taking him on," says Strichart. "What's great about Ryuji is that he's a dragon in his own right, on a completely different spectrum from Kiryu, but still bound to his own version of ideals. Ryuji is what happens when you give a dragon ambition, and that makes him perhaps the most dangerous foe Kiryu faces in his whole arc."

*Yakuza Kiwami 2* adds a new storyline to the game, *The Majima Saga*, in which the flamboyant Goro Majima steps into the spotlight. His adventure takes place during the interim between the conclusion of *Yakuza Kiwami* and the start of *Yakuza Kiwami 2*. The Mad Dog of Shimano, as he is known, is as unpredictable as he is dangerous. Terada, the Tojo Clan

chairman, plans to rejuvenate the syndicate's fortunes and when the important position of clan captain becomes vacant, Akinobu Uematsu looks like the top contender, but Goro isn't about to let anyone else snag a prize like the clan captain role without a fight.

"Majima has become a very popular character both in and outside Japan," says producer Daisuke Sato. "In 2013, we held a character popularity vote, and Majima came in at number one, even surpassing our main character, Kiryu. That's what prompted us to make him one of the main characters in *Yakuza 0*. We added *The Majima Saga* in *Kiwami 2* because we wanted to give the fans something new who've been with us since *Yakuza 0*."

## SIN CITIES AND GANGLAND STYLE

The backdrop for this underworld tale of turmoil is twofold. There's the bustling nightlife of Kamurocho in Tokyo and Sotenbori in Osaka. The game uses an open world format, allowing players to explore and interact at will. "We put a lot of our emphasis on realistic design," says Sato. "We visit the actual cities that we base these designs off, taking even the atmosphere of the city into consideration. We look at how the clusters of businesses in each area differ, too. For instance, some streets have a lot of restaurants, another street has more cabaret clubs, and so on. We take great effort to capture what makes each area unique, and the same holds true when we create any city, whether that's Kamurocho or beyond."

Just as important as the designs for the cityscapes that the yakuza inhabit are the designs for the gangsters themselves. "Generally, we prioritize a character's image to ensure that





"AFTER KIRYU LITERALLY WRECKS THE ENTIRE TOJO CLAN IN *YAKUZA*, IT WAS PRETTY ESSENTIAL TO GIVE HIM A VILLAIN THAT WOULD BE UP TO THE CHALLENGE OF TAKING HIM ON." **SCOTT STRICHART**

they're visually distinguishable from each other," explains Sato. "In the real world, you can't take one look at someone and tell that they're a yakuza as easily as perhaps you could in the past. Japanese laws have made it hard to get by in life if people find out that you're part of organized crime, of course. So, yakuza look different these days, but we still prioritize their image when we're designing them. That said, if say that character represents a symbol of modern yakuza, we would emphasize that aspect more than making them visually unique. Someya from *Yakuza 6: The Song of Life* is one of these characters. He doesn't have a tattoo."

## TAKE A BREAK

In addition to the main game itself, mini-games are an integral part of the *Yakuza* experience as players can try their hands at traditional tests of skill like mah-jong and shogi, gamble at poker and blackjack, work on their golf swing on the driving range, become an idol photographer in the gravure photo studio featuring real idols Rina Hashimoto and Hikaru Aoyama, or go out for some karaoke.

"*Kiwami 2* has all sorts of new minigames!" declares Strichart. "I think the standouts are going to be the return of

the cabaret simulator from *Yakuza 0*, the all new version of the clan creator, *Virtual-On*, and... *Toylets*. Because they're bonkers and perfectly on brand for *Yakuza*."

The *Toylets* are mini-games that can only be accessed when Kiryu has to lighten his load, so to speak. In order to access those, he'll need to fill up on food and drink, necessitating a trip to the loo. It's not all po-faced gangsters fighting to the death. (See the screenshot above for a taster...)

*Virtual-On* is the 1990s 3D fighting game in which mecha called Virtuaroids duke it out, or for those who prefer human-sized combat, there's the Coliseum. In this arena, players can participate in an Inferno Tournament, wherein parts of the arena burst into flame, a Shockwave Tournament with an electrified fence to fry your enemies, or an eight-man Battle Royale where it's every man or beast for themselves.

The Clan Creator returns from *Yakuza 6: The Song Of Life*, in which players control a squad of fighters in a tactical battle to protect Majima Construction from a very hostile takeover. The cast of enemies in Clan Creator includes stars from New Japan Pro Wrestling like Masahiro Chono, Riki Choshu, Tatsumi Fujinami, Keiji Mutoh, and Genichiro Tenryu. "We have lots of wrestling fans in the office, and even >>>

4. Play as you pee with the *Toylets*. Definitely not weird at all. 5. Shortly thereafter, Kiryu had his chiropractor's licence revoked. 6. The Mad Dog of Shimano runs amok.

## The Kids Aren't All Right

Takeshi Kitano's 1996 film *Kids Return* is a drama about two high school dropouts. While Shinji (Masanobu Ando) aspires to become a professional boxer, the impatient, brash Masaru (Ken Kaneko) joins the yakuza. It's an illuminating look at how organised crime appeals to disillusioned young men in need of purpose.





"WE'VE BEEN REVAMPING THE BATTLE SYSTEM SINCE *YAKUZA 0* UNDER THE CONCEPT OF WHAT *YAKUZA* IS KNOWN FOR, WHICH ARE CONTROLS THAT CAN MAKE ANYONE FEEL LIKE THEY'RE BATTLING WITH A LOT OF STYLE AND FLAIR." **DAISUKE SATO**

>>> the director is a huge fan," says Sato. "Voices and faces are captured directly, and their battle styles are based off their trademark moves and submissions. It feels to me like we've created something wrestling fans can really get into."

Or if you prefer glamour to bruises, in Nightlife Island players assume the management of the Four Shine cabaret club and must strive to become the top club in all Japan. Essentially this means matching the right hostess to each customer who comes to the club, catering to their particular personality and tastes. Sounds classy.

It's all intended to keep the fans happy. "I'd like to think we keep our

pulse on the fandom pretty well," says Strichart. "There are of course some fans who have been with us since the beginning, and others who have jumped on board in more recent days, now that their friends are shouting from the rooftops or literally forcing the game into their hands in some cases.

"I really appreciate the fans who hold the door open for new fans instead of putting up gates, and that's most of them! It's an incredible fanbase, and I never get tired of seeing the antics they get up to."

Join the battle for the fate of the Tojo Clan when *Yakuza Kiwami 2* comes to the PlayStation 4 on 28 August from SEGA. ●





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